

Changing Society
in
India and Pakistan

CHANGING SOCIETY

in

INDIA and PAKISTAN

A Study in Social Change and Social Stratification

BY

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PREFACE

The purpose of this book is to study the impact of British rule on social change and social stratification in India and Pakistan, with special reference to East Pakistan. Evidently, it is necessary for us at the very outset to explain such terms as *social stratification* and *social class*.

There is comparatively greater agreement on the meaning of the term "social stratification" than on the meaning of "social class". According to Sorokin, "Social stratification means the differentiation of a given population into hierarchically superimposed classes. It is manifested in the existence of upper and lower social layers." Social stratification is to be found in all human societies. The more complex the civilization is, the more complex is the social stratification. In simpler societies, sometimes a lesser degree of social stratification is to be found, but in none of them do we find the complete lack of it. It is generally agreed that social stratification does not depend on wealth, power and occupation alone. Age, sex, personal qualities and talents, education, intelligence may also serve to differentiate individuals into higher and lower categories. Some writers have thought of social stratification in terms of the totality of invidious distinctions. By social stratification, we mean something which is essentially *objective*, that is, we can find out a social stratum with such objective criteria as occupation, power, income, standard of living, education, intelligence, or some other such criteria.

But such strata are not necessarily classes. Classes are psycho-social groupings, something which is *subjective* in character, dependent upon class consciousness (i.e., the feeling of group membership). How far class consciousness corresponds to

the "logical" lines of cleavage of objective criteria, set by the social scientists, may be a subject of study and in recent times such studies have been pursued in the United States. In the U. S. the psychology of class differentiation is being studied with thoroughness and techniques for the observation, analysis, and recording of the behaviour of groups in relation to one another have been developed. Although it seems to the present writer that most of such studies have analysed the static aspect of the problem, whereas the role of the social classes in social change has been neglected, the studies are nevertheless valuable for the purpose of understanding, with some measure of exactitude, how different social classes feel and behave toward each other at any given period of time.

In India and Pakistan such studies have not yet begun, at least to any appreciable degree. But that class-consciousness prevails cannot be denied. Different classes have organized themselves into different purposive organizations (such as Trade Unions, Chambers of Commerce, Peasants' Associations, etc.), as well as into political parties (such as Peasants' Party, Socialist Party, Landlords' Party, etc.), and such organizations and associations have voiced their class feelings. The different professional classes (such as journalists, lawyers, teachers, clerks, etc.) have organized themselves into purposive organizations and have voiced their class grievances. But the development of class organizations and class-consciousness among the workers and peasants have taken place rather late. The first All India Trade-Union Congress was held in 1921, and this might be considered the beginning of the labour movement in India. But here also the initiative came from some middle class intellectuals, such as N. M. Joshi, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Joseph Baptista, who wished to ameliorate the conditions of Indian working class by developing the Indian working class movement on the English pattern. Although the Trade Union movement

in India and Pakistan is relatively much weaker than its counterpart in the west, nevertheless such a purposive organization is much stronger than the peasant organizations. Peasant organizations could hardly be built on an all-India basis and peasant movements have been sporadic and localized. There came into existence the All India Kisan Shava (All India Peasants' Association), but it hardly represented any large section of the Indian peasants. The two World Wars sharpened the economic conflict and the left nationalists, socialists, and communists utilized the peasant discontent to organize the peasants into various associations for their particular purposes.

The study of such purposive associations and political parties can give us a picture of the class consciousness prevailing in India and Pakistan. In our analysis for the most part we have assumed that such a class consciousness prevails and on that basis we have proceeded to the analysis of the correlation of different classes in the society and how those classes are superimposed in a hierarchical relationship. We have here made a historical approach to the problem and our main emphasis has been on the examination of the nature of social classes and social stratification as they existed in the pre-British period and in what way these social classes and social stratification were affected by British rule.

It should, however, be noted here that the determination and differentiation of social classes and social stratification have become difficult only with the development of capitalism. Social stratification was relatively much simpler in the east as well as in the west before the open-class system was introduced. The British capitalist enterprise had in India its greatest impact upon the urban areas. But the rural areas still retain their traditional class differentiation to a large extent, although economic changes are gradually affecting the village as well. Because of this one would be surprised to observe how conscious

are the villagers about the minute details of class differentiation among different folks in the village. In my investigations I have found that the villagers speak of the social stratification of their village almost with the exactitude of a social scientist. The rural social stratification, therefore, does not present much difficulty. Our difficulty increases when we attempt to study urban or industrial social stratification. Here people belonging to different castes and communities assemble together and in a factory, for example, a member of the lower caste may occupy a higher position in the office than a member of a higher caste. Again, in spite of caste and such other traditional differences, the different members of different castes and communities may come together into one purposive organization like the Trade Union. But it is difficult to say to what extent such purposive organizations have been able to develop class consciousness of the workers in the new economy introduced by the British capitalist enterprise. Doubtless, the economic changes have led to the transformation in the social structure of Indian society, but it has not necessarily led to the development of class consciousness to any appreciable degree.

Although the class consciousness has not as yet taken any concrete shape, the political consciousness has been developed to a great degree, due to the fight for political liberty of the country. The political parties formulated their election programmes and directed the propaganda to emphasize the economic problems. The major political parties have generally appealed to the nationalistic and religious sentiments of the people. In this book we shall take up the discussion of the development of political consciousness among the Muslims in Bengal. But it will be interesting here to analyse the respective strength of different political parties at the general elections of the Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1936-37 under the Govern-

ment of India Act, 1935, when for the first time the minimum qualifications of the voters were changed in such a way as to include a substantial section of the peasantry of Bengal.

BENGAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
GENERAL ELECTIONS OF 1936-37

Indian National Congress	...	...	60
[43 out of 60 were Congress <i>tout court</i> , the rest 17 carried tickets of miscellaneous political parties under the Congress aegis, such as, Scheduled Caste Association, Labour, Tipperah Krishak Shamity (Tipperah Peasants' Society), etc.]			
Muslim League	...	...	40
Krishak-Proja Party	...	...	35
Non-party Muslims	...	...	41
Non-party Scheduled Caste group		...	23
Non-party Caste Hindus	...	...	14
Europeans	...	...	25
Total			238

(This is out of the total strength of the House of 250. The political affiliations of the remaining 12 could not be ascertained).

From R. Coupland, *The Constitutional Problem in India* (London : Oxford University Press, 1944), Vol. II, p. 27.

The Bengal Krishak-Proja Party (or the Bengal Peasants' Party) was led by the veteran Muslim politician Mr A. K. Fazlul Huq and as we see from the figures showed some initial success. But such an initial success of the party was due more to the personal popularity of Mr A. K. Fazlul Huq than to the solidarity of the peasant movement in Bengal. The peasants' movement in India was of a localized nature, and especially

among the Bengali Muslims it was more so. A good number of the Muslim members were elected to the legislature on the tickets from local Peasants' Societies. But such a development of political and class consciousness was soon deflected into other channels and the All India Muslim League, claiming the separate state of Pakistan and emphasizing the separate nature of Muslim rights and privileges, was soon in a position to capture the popular imagination of the Bengali Muslim voters. As a result, at the general elections of the Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1946-47, the All India Muslim League captured all Muslim seats in the Legislature. (Out of 250 seats in the Bengal Legislative Assembly, 119 were Muslim seats. The Muslim League captured almost all of the 119 seats, with the exception of 4 or 5 seats. These 4 or 5 seats were elected independently, partly because of their personal popularity and partly because of the relative backwardness of the areas from which they were elected. Even those 4 or 5 Muslims immediately after their election joined the Muslim League in its demand for the separate state of Pakistan.) Similarly, the All India National Congress captured practically all "general" (representing mainly the caste Hindus) and scheduled caste seats with the exception of a few. Thus, we see that although the voting figures of 1936-37 general elections show the development of class and political consciousness of the peasants as peasants, the religious-cum-political appeal made on the basis of the demand for a separate state of Pakistan for the Muslims ultimately proved to be more powerful than the economic appeal of the Bengal Proja Party (Bengal Peasants' Party). But even in the religious appeal the economic appeal was concealed. The vast masses of the Muslims in Bengal are poor and heavily indebted. The vast masses of the Hindus are so too. But in general, the insignificant minority of the creditor class is recruited from the Hindus and the landlord class is also primarily Hindu. The religious-political propaganda con-

vinced the Muslim peasants in Bengal that Pakistan would mean his emancipation from the clutches of the Hindu moneylenders and landlords. To the Muslim landlords (who, however, were never a powerful class in Bengal) the Muslim peasants were bound by religious, social, and feudal ties, while religious and political consciousness divorced him from their Hindu counterpart. These factors explain why the Muslim League was in a position to get the support of the vast majority of the poor and indebted Muslim peasantry of Bengal. Moreover, the religious appeal became a "national" appeal to the Muslims and they felt that for the separate state of Pakistan, they all should sink their differences. But with Pakistan once established, it seems that political parties based primarily on economic programmes would again come to prominence. Latest news reports show that as the general elections to the East Bengal legislature are nearing, such political parties based on economic programmes are again coming into existence. Only the future election results can demonstrate how far the peasants of East Pakistan are conscious as peasants.

Here we must say a word about the method of study followed in this book. Our method of study has been historical. For a variety of reasons, I feel that history can be made the most important tool for understanding the social problems of India and Pakistan. Sociological studies may follow many different lines, but in India and Pakistan the vast field of history must first be exploited by the sociologist. Again, history is essential in understanding the dynamics of social change. Half a century back, a profound scholar on Indian history, Vincent Smith, was writing, "The history of India in the Muhammadan period must necessarily be a chronicle of kings, courts and conquests, rather than one of national and social evolution." This mistaken view about the historical study was left unchallenged for a long period. A good number of historians of India, except a few

during the second quarter of the present century, followed the footsteps laid down by Vincent Smith. In their researches a great wealth of materials about Indian history was discovered, but in such detailed "stories of kings, courts and conquests", the social history of the people was practically lost.

The sociologist of today can fruitfully utilize these materials for building up a real social history of India and Pakistan. We have of course no such ambitious aim in the present study. We have concerned ourselves here only with one aspect of the social development and have tried to look at history from the standpoint of a sociologist. In such a study we have laid particular stress upon economic factors as the determinant of social change. By such an approach we do not wish to minimize the importance of *other factors* in the social evolution. But here also arises the question of priority. I feel that to make historical study most fruitful in the perspectives of our country, stress upon the economic factors is essential. In the west, too, various writers, including the non-Marxists, feel the necessity of the study of society from the economic aspect, because they agree that although the economic factor is not the only determinant of social causation, it is by far the most important.

A word must also be said about the importance and scope of our study. The factual documentation of Hindu social classes seems to be abundant and therefore a book on Indian social classes might appear superfluous. Nevertheless it appears to the present writer that more attention should be paid to such research and the problem of social classes should be studied particularly from the standpoint of social change. Moreover, it seems to me that although the general nature of social classes and social stratification of India and Pakistan has been able to draw a great deal of attention from various writers, very few studies have been conducted to elicit the nature of social stratification among the Muslims.

In Part I of the book, we have taken up the discussion of the general characteristics of social stratification in pre-British India, with special reference to rural and urban areas. We have discussed primarily the problem from the standpoint of social change and have sought to find out the causes of the apparent and relative stability of the Indian society as compared with the west. Our study, therefore, has been mostly comparative with the European development. Because of the magnitude of the problem, we had to confine ourselves mainly to some fundamental issues. In our search for the causes of the specific stability of the Indian society, we have made use of the "hydraulic theory" of the origin of great states in Asia. As is well-known, Karl Wittfogel, German, and a number of American social scientists are paying increasing attention to this theory in their exposition of the Asiatic societies. It has not been possible for me to make any detailed exposition of the theory in the context of India and Pakistan. But I feel that much can be done to determine the exact nature of the importance of irrigation in the social structure of our country.

In Part II, we have taken up the discussion of the Muslim social classes, with special reference to East Pakistani Muslims. For such a study we had to go back to the rise of Islam. It appears to the present writer that excellent studies could be conducted for determining the genuine nature of Islamic societies. Though we have an abundance of writings on the minute details of theological controversies in Islam, very few studies have been conducted from the sociological standpoint.

In Part III, I have given the description of the social organization of a village in East Pakistan. I have compared my own impressions about it with some recent studies of villages in India and Pakistan which have been appearing in various social science journals in America. This I felt to be necessary,

because theoretical and historical study to be fruitful must also be empirical. But a great deal remains to be done in this field. Empirical studies to be of any significance must need be conducted on a group basis and I would plead to the social scientists of our country to pay greater attention to this field.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

New York City

October, 1953

A. K. NAZMUL KARIM

[This "Preface" was written in October, 1953, before the general elections to the provincial legislature of East Bengal, which were held in 1954. Therefore, I could not assess the post-election developments in East Pakistan. But the reader will find that my contention that political parties based on economic programme would capture the popular imagination later on came to be true. This is proved by the signal victory of the United Front of parties primarily based on economic issues in the general elections of 1954.]

INTRODUCTION

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Introduction

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW ERA

The major change in the social structure of the Indian sub-continent began with the British capitalist enterprise. Under the feudal¹ system in India, as in Europe, land was the principal form of wealth. The British rule for the first time began to create, on a large scale, new forms of wealth, e.g., money and credit. The British capitalist enterprise, because of its very nature, detached this new form of wealth from its feudal institutional setting; that is, from the traditional distinctions of birth, land control and status. The evolution of this new wealth therefore greatly weakened birth as the determinant of status. In this sense, the British rule in India became revolutionary in its implications. It introduced an element of social mobility into the highly rigid structure of Indian society.

From the historic past the Hindu society developed a highly stratified structure. It is generally agreed that the social classes take the extreme form of caste, when birth determines the whole life of the individual. Such a rigid social stratification therefore permanently seals the chance of social mobility. However social immobility is not the only peculiarity of the Hindu caste system; in feudal Europe too, birth determined the status of an

¹ Here the term "feudal" has been used in a special sense. Vide. Chapter II of this book.

overwhelming majority of the people. M. Senart² points out that the principles of the social structure of the Greeks and the Romans show a striking similarity to those of the Hindus. It was with the growth of commercial, financial and factory production enterprise in Europe that the rigidity of feudal social classes began to break down, which ultimately made room for an open-class system in the west.

Although the above observation regarding the rigidity of social classes is particularly applicable to the Hindu social system, it had always had a pervading influence upon all sections of Indian society. Unlike previous regimes, the Muslim rule introduced many major changes in India and thus created the possibility for the transformation of Indian feudal society into a capitalist one. Just at the moment when the incipient native bourgeoisie would have captured political power, India was conquered by the British merchant adventurers. So the feat of such a major social, political and economic change was performed by a foreign commercial power, viz., the British East India Company and the native bourgeoisie thus failed to perform its revolutionary social role.

In this book we shall take issues with some popular views. One such view is that when India was conquered by the British, it was for the first time conquered by a nation which had a superior technology, while all other previous conquerors (including the Muslims) had attained much less advanced methods of production than what India already had. It has been repeatedly pointed out that the Muslim and other conquerors came from a place where the people had not crossed the pastoral stage of civilization, whereas India had a developed agricultural civiliza-

² Emil Senart, Transl. by Sir E. Denison Ross, *Caste in India* (London: Methuen & Co., 1930), especially part III—"Origins", pp.148—206.

tion. But the fact is that in the Central Asian territories during the Muslim supremacy there was significant commercial development. So the Muslim conquerors, coming from that region, were acquainted with improved techniques of "large scale use of money." On the contrary Indian economy was based upon self-sufficient village communities, which because of this very reason required little use of money. During the whole period of the Muslim rule we find that Muslim kings and emperors were minting more and more coins and the Indian made goods began increasingly to enter into the international market. Trade and commerce were stimulated and a prosperous native bourgeoisie appeared at the commercial centres. Thus during the Muslim rule money economy began mildly to affect the self-sufficient nature of Indian village communities and one or two village products gradually found market in urban centres. In such a context, conditions, in the pattern of Europe, were apparently created for the native bourgeoisie for the capture of political power. But at that very moment the British merchant capitalists appeared on the scene and the Indian bourgeoisie thus failed in the performance of the feat.

The Muslim rule because of its very nature set in force certain changes which mildly affected the fundamental economic structure of the community. The Muslim rule no doubt created the possibility of a greater social change, but ultimately failed to transform the fundamental economic foundation. "The Muslims were in any case a minority and, as such, were inevitably influenced by their contact with the Hindu majority. Indian manners were adopted and class distinctions, resembling but much looser than caste, found a place in their social organization."³ Because of this it could not change the traditional composition of social classes in any vital sense (although with-

³ L. S. S. O'Malley, ed., *Modern India and the West* (London, etc.: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 7.

in the Muslim social structure the Muslim rule achieved some degree of success in changing the traditional social stratification).

Again, because of an altogether different nature of the British rule, it brought about vital changes in the economic field, unlike any other previous regimes. The British rule could achieve the change in the relationships of social classes in a radical sense within the course of less than two hundred years of rule. The British capitalist enterprise shattered once and for all the former economic foundation of the community. New social forces created by capitalism began to affect vitally the ancient social stratification, both among the Hindus and Muslims. The two World Wars facilitated the process of the break down. In recent years, the partition of India has given further impetus towards a new orientation of the traditional social stratification of India and Pakistan. Social classes which were once deprecated are coming into prominence and taking an important role in the society.

It therefore becomes necessary for us to find out how the British rule in India affected the fundamental economic foundation and social classes and social structure itself connected with that economic foundation?

PART I

SOCIAL TRANSITION IN INDIA & PAKISTAN

CHAPTER I

CHANGING RURAL PATTERNS

SECTION I

“Unchanging” Village Communities

The main form of wealth in pre-British India was land. The main economy was agriculture. The social relations that existed were based upon such an agricultural economy. This agricultural economy of India was organized on the basis of the village communities.¹ In the land relations that existed in the pre-British period, the villages played an important role. It is necessary therefore to understand the role of the village in the land relations in particular and in the economy of the country in general, because the social stratification in pre-British India was necessarily built upon that land relation.

¹ “India has been called a land of villages, and if proof is needed of the truth of the description, it is found in the Census figures which show that rural population numbers over 300 million or nine-tenths of the total population. Practically the whole country is parcelled out among villages, about half a million in number.” L.S.S. O'Malley, *India's Social Heritage* (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1934), p.100. It is natural that in a land of such overwhelming rural population, the villages exercise by far the greatest influence upon the social life of the country. Any study of the Indian social phenomenon must therefore take into account the role of the village communities. The term “village” has a slightly different connotation in Indian context than it has in the west. Therefore, it is necessary to define it. B.H. Baden-Powell says, “.....the term (*village*) does not refer merely to a street or group of buildings—as in England of today; it includes both the cluster of houses and the surrounding lands cultivated. Such a group has always a local name and known limits.” B.H. Baden-Powell, *Origin and Growth of Village Communities in India* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co.), pp. 7-8.

The cluster of houses might be lumped together or they might be scattered throughout the whole area occupied by the village. The term “village” always connotes a distinct geographical area. Again, the term also signifies a body of persons, who will tend to form a “community” more

The attention of the British administrators was early drawn to the vital role that the village communities in India were playing in the economy and the social organization of the country. The static nature of the Indian village communities, maintained by a static economy, early struck their imagination. In 1830, Sir (later Lord) Charles Metcalfe, one of the ablest British officials in India, described these village communities in words which have often been quoted: "The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds revolution; Hindu, Pathan, Mughal, Mahratta, Sikh, English, are masters in turn; but the village communities remain the same. In times of trouble they arm and fortify themselves; a hostile army passes through the country; the Village Community collect their cattle within their walls, and let the army pass unprovoked; if plunder and devastation is directed against themselves and force employed is irresistible, they flee to friendly villages at a distance, but when the storm had passed over they return and resume their occupation. If a country remains for series of years the scene of continual pillage and massacre, so that the village cannot be inhabited, the villagers nevertheless return whenever the power of peaceable possession revives. A generation may pass away but the succeeding generation will return. The sons will take place of their fathers, the same site for the village, the same position for the houses, the same lands will be occupied by the descendants of those who were driven out before the village was depopulated; and it is not a trifling matter that will drive them or less self-contained. We will presently examine the self-sufficient nature of the village constitution. Because of the self-sufficient nature of the Indian villages, there always developed institutions within the village, which not only performed the "economic" functions, but the "government" functions as well.

out, for they will often maintain their post through times of disturbance and convulsion, and acquire strength sufficient to resist pillage and oppression with success."²

Note—Sir Charles Metcalfe was writing in the early part of the nineteenth century, and therefore he could not see the vast changes the British rule was destined to bring about in the Indian village constitution.

Sir Charles Metcalfe was the British resident at Delhi from 1811-1814 A.D. and passed his later official career in the northern India, therefore his remark is particularly applicable to the conditions in northern India. Despite this, any comparison with the village constitution of the southern, eastern, or western India will show basic similarities to the description left by Sir Charles Metcalfe.

We shall here give some other characteristic descriptions of village communities of other parts of India by other British administrators. Elphinstone, describing the Deccan village communities, says, "These communities contain in miniature all the materials of a State within themselves and are almost sufficient to protect their members if all other government were withdrawn."³ Denzil Ibbetson in his Report on the Census of the Punjab, 1881, says, ".....Such industries as are necessary to supply the simple needs of the village are prosecuted in the

² Percival Spear, as quoted by, *Twilight of the Mughals* (Cambridge, England: at the University Press, 1951), p. 117. We shall here quote from Sir Henry Maine, who also gives a similar description of the Indian village constitution. "...the least destructible institution of society which never willingly surrenders any of its usage to innovations. Conquests and revolutions seem to have swept over it without disturbing or displacing it, and the most beneficent systems of government in India have always been those which have recognized it as the basis of Indian administration."...as quoted by L.S.S. O'Malley, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

³ Elphinstone's Report on the Deccan, etc., as quoted by Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 10, footnote.

village itself. The Punjab village is eminently self-sustaining, it grows its own food, it makes its own implements, moulds its own domestic vessels, its priests live within its walls, it does without a doctor, and looks to the outside world for little more than its salt, its spices, the fine cloth for its holiday clothes, and the coin in which it pays its revenue.”⁴

But the British rule in India began to affect vitally the village organization and consequently today it is difficult to find traditional village communities. But as C. G. Chenevix-Trench suggested those villages which were least affected by the British rule, can give us some idea of the traditional Indian village constitution. He says that these can be found in the Indian States (meaning Indian princely states). He says, “The exemplar State shall be Rajputana, the village one of respectable Hindu cultivators, Jats predominating. They are a republic in miniature, with a decided oligarchic tinge. The State treats them with respect. Written orders from the Raj, departmental notices and the like to be promulgated in the village, are punctiliously addressed, ‘The Patels, Panches, Patwari and cultivators, one and all, of *Gam* (i.e. village) so and so.’ The Patels, who vary in number, are the hereditary headmen; the panches, in theory the Big Five, but generally more or less than five, are their council, to which an elective body of *bhanjgars* (reputable men) are added. By *patwari* is meant the village accountant, in Rajputana almost always a Vaisya (*bania*), while in the United and the Central Provinces the profession is almost always, monopolized by the Caste of the Kayasthas. The word ‘cultivator’ employed in the Raj’s order would exclude the low castes. The executive arm of the *patels* and the *panches* is the *gam-balahi*, who, though invariably an untouchable weilds great power and

⁴ Denzil Ibbetson, *Report on the Census of the Punjab, 1881*, p. 18, as quoted by Gadgil, *Ibid.*, p. 11.

influence. His special duty is to muster his fellow untouchables and arrange for the performance of any public duties, paid and unpaid, which by custom fall to their lot. Prominent among these (misnamed) 'outcastes' are the barber, washerman, drum-beater, wheel-wright, and black-smith, who render communal service and are remunerated in grain twice a year from the threshing floors. But the majority will be field labourers, probably aboriginals, to whom no work, however unpleasant, is unlawful. They are the dispossessed, yet by no means weaponless against oppression. If, for example, a Jat's cow dies in its owner's sitting room or verandah, only an untouchable can remove the corpse. The urgency of this operation, especially when the thermometer stands 118° F. in the shade, encourages the cultivators to remain in friendly terms with their social inferiors."⁵

What is relevant for our purpose is that within these apparently "unchanging" village communities, different functional groups maintained a stratified relationship, the understanding of which is necessary for our analysis of the present social structures of India and Pakistan. The functional groups maintained an unalterable division of labour. This unalterable division of labour and the stratified social relationship arising out of such a division of labour was the main cause of the traditionalism of Indian economic life, which stood in the way of all economic progress. This aspect of the Indian village economy could not escape the acute mind of the German sociologist, Max Weber. He says, "India has been a country of villages in so far as social stratification is concerned, not only the position of the village artisan but also the caste order as a whole must be viewed as a bearer of stability."⁶

⁵ C.G. Chenevix-Trench, "The Rural Community," in E.A.H. Blunt, *Social Service in India* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1946), pp. 80-81.

⁶ From *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, transl. by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 412.

SECTION II

**Organization of Social Classes within the
Village Communities**

Until the beginning of the British rule the different functional groups within the village maintained an unchanging division of labour. These functional groups did not produce for the market, but for the consumption of the village community itself. The village "servants" in their turn did not receive money payment for their services but were paid in kind. The nature of their products and their respective duties were determined by the village community itself. It has been pointed out by many writers that this simplicity of organization was the cause of the unprogressiveness of the Indian villages.

For a true appreciation of the Indian village constitution, we therefore require an exposition of the different functional groups within the village, because the social organization of the village rested upon the interrelationships that existed between them. For our analysis, we shall first take up a sixteenth-century village in Bengal. It is true that the self-sufficient nature of the village has been to a large extent broken up by the British rule, but the villages in India and Pakistan still tend to be self-sufficient. The process of industrialization and the introduction of improved means of communications have gone a long way toward breaking down the isolated character of the villages in India and Pakistan. But the effects of the spread of modern means of communications and development of trade and industries are not so widespread as they might at first sight appear to be. Industrialized areas are still few in number and there are still large areas where the modern means of communications are not available. And consequently many villages still remain self-sufficient and isolated. Even as late as 1928, the Royal Commission on Agriculture remarked about Indian agriculture:

"...Circumstances have combined to maintain what is, in large measure, a self-sufficing type of agriculture. Since the Government of India passed, in 1858, from the East India Company to that of the Crown, there have been many developments but the main characteristics of village life are still those of the centuries anterior to British rule, each village tends to be self-sufficient."⁷

As late as 1930-31, we again find the following description of the Indian villages in *The Statement Exhibiting the Moral and Material Progress of India during the year 1930-1931*, p. 103: "Throughout the greater part of the country the typical self-contained Indian village community which has been maintained unmodified for centuries, still exists—an interesting and surprisingly intricate social organism, in many ways resembling rural unit which we read in histories of medieval Europe, and containing its land-holders and tenants and agricultural labourers, its priest and its religious mendicant, its money lender, and order of artisans—the carpenter, the blacksmith, and the weaver, the potter and the oil-presser—each with his clearly prescribed functions hallowed by centuries of tradition."⁸

In their recent study of the village Senapur in the district of Jaunpur in the eastern part of the U.P., India, Morris Opler and Rudra Datt Singh have observed this tendency towards self-sufficiency. They say, "The castes and residents of Senapur provide most of the skills and labour necessary to the maintenance of the village. However,the village is by no means self-sufficient. Some castes are so poorly represented in Senapur that efforts of its resident members must be supplemented by visits of members from neighbouring villages."⁹

⁷ Ramkrishna Mukherjee, "Economic Structure of Rural Bengal" *American Sociological Review*, 1948, Vol. 13, p. 660.

⁸ As quoted by O'Malley, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-116.

⁹ Carleton S. Coon, *A Reader in General Anthropology* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1950), pp. 465 & 493.

A Sixteenth-Century Village in Bengal

In our description of the Rajputana village, we have already noticed how different functional groups in the village maintain a stratified relationship. We shall here discuss in somewhat greater detail a village of Bengal in the sixteenth-century, because the study of the caste-structure will throw light upon the functioning social structure of the village.

The description of how the different functional groups within the village maintained a hierarchical relationship, is to be found in the writings of the Bengali poet Mukundaram, who composed his epic probably in the sixteenth century (between 1578-1589 A.D.) at Burdwan (in West Bengal). The picture drawn by Mukundaram is unique, because there is no other contemporary account giving the details of village life, as it existed before it was substantially affected by the impact of the Muslim rule. The Indian scholar J.N. Das Gupta of the Calcutta University has attempted the reconstruction of the social history of Bengal in his book *Bengal in the Sixteenth Century*¹⁰ from the account given by the poet Mukundaram. We shall here describe the social classes in the village as left by Mukundaram from J.N. Das Gupta's book. (pp. 155-163). J.N. Das Gupta says:

“Conquering legions have tramped backwards and forwards over the plains of India, and over her mountain ranges; but her peasants have ploughed their fields, administered their village business, worshipped their gods, and perpetuated their families

¹⁰ J.N.Das Gupta, *Bengal in the Sixteenth Century* (Calcutta: Published by the University of Calcutta, 1914). It might be mentioned here that the description of village social life by Mukundaram has been taken as standard by many writers on Indian social problems, such as:

(i) L.S.S. O'Malley, *Modern India and the West* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 10-11.

(ii) Radhakamal Mukherjee, *Economic History of India 1600-1800* (London: Longman's Green & Co., n.d.), the chapter on “Social Stratification”, pp. 57-80.

as continuously as her sages have remained plunged in thought. Yet every change of dynasty, every conquering race, has left marks on the social and economic life of the people.

“Let us remember this in reviewing Mukundaram’s account of the foundation of a new town in India, and the description which follows of the various quarters of that town, affording as it does valuable materials for the reconstruction of the social and economic history of Bengal.”¹¹

The poet says that the different classes of people lived in different parts of the village. (The poet actually calls it a “city” or “nagar”; but as it was nothing but an over-grown village, we shall call it a village. Moreover, the social organization of the town did not substantially differ from that of the village in pre-British India. In a later section we shall discuss the nature of social stratification in pre-British Indian towns.) The poet says that the Muslims lived in a different quarter of the village from the Hindus and maintained a hierarchical relationship among the different classes of their population.

The Description of the Hindu Quarters

(1) The poet says that one quarter of the village is called *Kulastan* (*Kula*: Noble ; *stan*: quarter or place; i.e., the quarter of the noble born) where the higher-class Brahmins (Rarhi and Barendra Brahmins) lived with their temples and *tols* (i.e., religious schools). The lower class unlettered Brahmins also lived in that quarter. “They officiate as priests, and teach the rituals of worship.” (p. 155 of J. N. Das Gupta) The poet says, “The Ghatak Brahmins live by abuses. Their occupation is the reading of the *Kulpanji* (genealogies).....”(p. 156, *Ibid.*)

¹¹ J.N. Das Gupta, *Ibid.*, p. 155.

(2) Next in importance to the Brahmins are the astrologers, Sanyasis, Vaishnavas, Khetries, Rajputs, Bhats, and the Vaisyas. The poet says, "Let us now describe the medicine men (Vaidyas): They are the Guptas, Senas, Dases, etc., who live in this (Kulastan) part of the town.Agardanis (a low class of Brahmins, who officiate at funerals) live close to the Vaidyas, and they are daily in search of patients.The Vaisyas were traders, ".....a happy set of men, always, buying and selling." We have an account of the Kayesthas, on the south side of the village, who constituted the writer-caste. They made their demand thus : "Goddess *Vani* (Saraswati or the Goddess of Learning) is bountiful to us all. We can all read and write. We are the ornaments of the town. Decide to give us the best lands and make them rent free."¹²

After giving the above description of the upper classes of the village, the poet tells of the lower classes who live separately in another part of the village.

(1) The lower classes are represented by the agriculturist caste, such as the Hakil Gopes and Baruis; the artisan castes, such as, the goldsmiths, blacksmiths, braziers, potters, carpenters, dyers, oil-men, confectioners, spice-dealers, conch-shell bangle makers, cotton weavers, silk weavers; the most despised castes included *Doms* (sweepers), hunters, fishermen, date-plam-tappers and watchmen.

Note:—It is to be noted here that since hunting, fishing were the most primitive of all occupations in Bengal, the invaders of Bengal always regarded these occupations of the original inhabitants as low.

(2) The poet says that besides these upper and lower classes there were others who were required for the services of the village

¹² All the above quotations are from J.N. Das Gupta's translation of Mukundaram's Bengali writings. pp. 155-157.

but were not allowed to live within the general residential area of the village. They were the untouchables—the Kols, Korengs, and among others, the Maharattas, whose occupation, it is said, was the curing of diseased spleens and performing the operation for cataract.¹³

The Description of the Muslim Quarter

Let us now take up the discussion of the Muslim quarter given by the poet Mukundaram. There is no better description of the Muslim social classes of such an early period in any other writing. From the description the reader will find that a distinct “community” spirit among the Muslims was present even at such an early period. The Muslims of the poet Mukundaram’s day had a system of religious education of their own. The reader will find that the Mullah even in those days controlled the social life of the Muslims to a large extent and every now and then referred to the Quran for the settlement of everyday disputes. It is also to be observed that Muslims lived in a quarter of their own separate from the Hindus. Sir Henry Maine writing about three centuries later observed this feature of the Indian village organization when he said, “Sometimes men of widely different castes, or Mahomedans and Hindus, are found united in the same village group. But in such cases, the sections of the community dwell in different parts of the inhabited area.”¹⁴ Because we get a vivid picture of the Muslim social life of the poet Mukundaram’s day, it will be worthwhile to reproduce what the poet said about the Muslim quarter :—

¹³ J. N. Das Gupta, *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Henry Maine, *Village Communities in the East and West* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1872), p. 176.

“Leaving the city of Kalinga, the ryots of all castes settled in the city of *Bir*¹⁵ (hunter of the story) with their household gods. Accepting the *pan* (betel) of the *Bir*, in token of their agreement, the Mussulmans settle there, the western end of the town being assigned to them as their abode. There came the Moghuls, Pathans, Kazis mounted on horses, and the *Bir* gave them rent-free land for their houses. At the extreme western end of their settlement they made their *Hoseinbati*¹⁶ (place of Mohurru Tazia), and they congregated all about the place. They rise very early in the morning, and spreading a red *patty* (mat) they make their namajes (i.e. prayers) five times during the day. Counting *Sulaimani* beads, they meditate on Pir-Paigumbar. Each of them contributes to the decoration of the *Mokam* (Hosein’s House). Ten and twenty sit together (meaning a village council) and decide cases, always referring to the Koran, while others sitting in the market-place distribute the Pir Shirni (confectionaries offered to the Pir), beat the drum and raise the flag. They are very wise according to their own estimation, they never yield to any one, and they never give up *roza* (i.e. ritual fast during the Muslim calendar month Ramadan) as long as they have life in them.

“Their appearance is rather formidable. They have no hair on the head but they allow their beards to grow down to their chest.

“They always adhere to their own ways. They wear on their head a *topi* (cap) which has ten sides and what they call an *ijar* (pajama) tied tight round the waist. If they meet one who is bareheaded, they pass him by without uttering a word,

¹⁵ *Bir* is the hero of Mukundaram’s epic, who founded the new settlement of Burdwan (in West Bengal).

¹⁶ Among the Muslim community, the Shias particularly construct a semi-religious building, called *Imambara*, *Husain-bati*, etc., in addition to mosques. These are erected in honour of the memory of Imam Hasan and Husain, the grandsons of the Prophet of Islam, who are known in history as the early martyrs of Islam.

but going aside, they throw clods of earth at him. Many *mains* (i.e. gentlemen) with their followers settled there. Some contract *nika*, get a *sikka* (4 anna bit) and bless the pair by reading the *kalma*. With a sharp knife they (the Mollahs) butcher the fowl and get ten *gandas* of cowries (about a copper pice) as also the head of the animal killed. *Moktabs* (Muslim religious schools) were set up where young Mahommedans were taught by pious Maulvis.

“By making Roza Nemaj some become *Gola* (Moghul), while by accepting the occupation of a weaver one becomes a *Jolha* (weaver). Those who drive pack bullocks call themselves *Mookheri*. Those who sell cakes call themselves *Pitari*. Those who sell fish are called *Kabari*. Those who being Hindus become Mussulmans are called *Gorsal* (mixed). Those who beg for alms are called *Kals*. Those who make the weaver’s looms call themselves *salakars* (people who make a living out of the *Tantis*). Some go from town to town making coloured stripes. Some make bows and arrows and are called *Tirgars*, while those who make paper are called *Kagozia*. Some wander about night and day and are called *Kalandars* (Fakirs).”¹⁷

Thus in Mukundaram’s description we find not only a glimpse of the Muslim social life in the sixteenth century but also the picture of the Muslim social classes.

Interrelations of the Social Classes and the Nature of Democracy

The above is the hierarchical relationship of the social classes within the village we find in Mukundaram’s description. Since he wrote four centuries have passed, but the Hindu social system

¹⁷ The translation is from J. N. Das Gupta, pp. 89-92.

has been able to maintain its grip, so far as social stratification is concerned, upon the village communities to a large degree. The new social economy introduced by the British began gradually to affect the traditional structure. It is necessary to realize the nature of the interrelations of the castes as they existed before British rule and also as they exist now in many places of India and Pakistan, which have been least affected by the British rule. The different functional groups within the village had their caste guilds and councils for decisions of matters arising within the caste. But if it related to some matter outside the caste or some matter which the caste council could not decide, the matter used to be referred to the village council. The existence of extreme stratification implied that each caste or sub-caste lived in separate social worlds. This feature is still to be marked in the caste organization of the Indian villages. M. N. Srinivas in his recent study of the social organization of the Coorgs of Southern India marked this phenomenon,

“A consequence of the extreme stratification implied in the caste system is the tendency of each sub-caste, or each level of sub-castes, to live in a separate social world. The members of each sub-caste inhabit the same quarter of the village or town and frequently are all related to each other by agnatic or affinal links. They share common culture and ritual idiom. They observe common traditional occupation, the secrets of which they do not share with others. They have caste courts and assemblies where elders of sub-castes belonging to different village assemble and decide matters of common concern. The members of a sub-caste share certain common values and are actively aware of this fact when they come into contact with other castes. The autonomy of a sub-caste does not, however, mean that it can live independently of other sub-castes. An Indian village usually consists of a few sub-castes which are mutu-

ally dependent and also possess certain interests in common.”¹⁸

The caste always has a tendency to cut across territorial ties, but at the same time it was also the tendency of the village communities to be all-comprehensive and to demand final obedience from all members within them. “Caste ties cut across territorial ties, and members of the same caste living in different villages have a great deal in common. This type of solidarity has been called.....‘horizontal’ solidarity, and it contrasts with the ‘vertical’ solidarity, which is common to a number of castes occupying different positions in the hierarchy. For instance, the members of a village community, whatever their caste, have certain interests in common.”¹⁹

Here we must say a few words about the power structure in the village communities. How could we reconcile democracy with a high degree of stratification ? The village councils are democratic in the sense that all classes and communities are represented on the village councils. But such a representation need not necessarily imply that there is democracy in the village councils. Democracy implies equality and therefore in a highly stratified society there cannot be democracy in the true sense of the term. But Radhakamal Mukherjee is of the opinion that the existence of the caste system did not stand in the way of the working of the democratic village constitution. He says, “I have found many powerful and influential village councils composed of Brahmins, Sudras, carpenter, blacksmiths, fishermen, earth-diggers and Mussalmans. The grama-panchayat would thus often consist of fifty to hundred members, and be presided over by the village headmen and accountant. They would settle questions relating to the repair and maintenance of irrigation channels, digging and repairing wells, building or

¹⁸ M.N.Srinivas, *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India* (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1952), pp. 31-32

¹⁹ *Loc. cit.*

repairing temples, arranging for temple festivals, processions or amusements, etc.. In the district of Salem, I know of a Palla or an 'untouchable', who has a seat in the village council. There is therefore no truth in the ill-informed but common opinion that caste from its very nature is opposed to the principle of self-government or in the observation of a French writer that the caste system permits juxtaposition of political and social elements, but does not produce their fusion; they mingle but they do not combine. There is nothing in the whole idea of caste which is foreign to active co-operation in the village assembly or the city guild."²⁰

Probably the more correct view on this point has been given by L.S.S. O'Malley, when he says, "In one way the caste was a democratic institution as its laws and regulations were the expression of the common will, to which all had to yield obedience. On the other hand, the system was the negation of democratic principles, its cardinal principle being a belief in the inherent and divinely-ordained inequality of man."²¹

The type of democracy that existed in the Indian villages, Radhakamal Mukherjee forgets, was seriously limited by the considerations of caste and the assumptions of the inherent inequality of men arising out of such a system. It is true that the lower castes were allowed participation in the village councils; but that did not necessarily make the councils democratic, because democracy does not mean mere participation. The oligarchical nature of the organization of the Indian village communities has been well brought out by Sir Henry Maine, "But, when the Indian village communities are more carefully scrutinised, a more complex structure discloses itself.

²⁰ Radhakamal Mukherjee, *Democracies of the East* (London: P.S. King and Son Ltd., 1923), p. 274.

²¹ O'Malley, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

...some dominant family occasionally claims a superiority over the whole brotherhood, and even over a number of separate villages, especially when the villagers form part of a larger aggregate, tribe or clan. But besides this the community itself is found, on close observation, to exhibit divisions which run through its internal framework. Sometimes men of widely different castes or Mahometans and Hindoos, are found united in the same village group; but in such cases its artificial structure is not disguised, and the sections of the community dwell in different parts of the inhabited area. But the most interesting division of the community—though one which creates most practical difficulty—may be described as a division into several parallel social strata. There are first a certain number of families who are said to have traditionally descended from the founder of the village;Below these families, descended from the originators of the colony, there are others, distributed into well ascertained groups. The brotherhood, in fact, forms a sort of hierarchy, the degrees of which are determined by the order in which the various sets of families were amalgamated with the community. The tradition is clear enough as to the succession of the groups and is probably the representation of a fact.”²²

SECTION III

The Village Constitution

According to L.S.S. O'Malley the village constitution has primarily two characteristic features : (1) the village fund and (2) the village *panchayat* (i.e. the village council). The common fund is maintained from the surcharges upon the rentals and from miscellaneous receipts from fisheries, trees, grazing, and

²² Maine, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-177.

market dues. From it common village expenses are met. The administration of this fund rests with a council of elders, generally selected from the proprietary families, usually called, *panchayat*, or the Rule of the Five, which controls the village administration. The Panchayat is an active institution among village communities of tribal type, but in others it has lost much of its former power owing to the intrusion of other agencies and the growing tendency to refer disputes to the law court instead of settling them locally.

Again, in addition to the village panchayat, there might be the village headman, who represents the villagers in their dealing with the government. It has been pointed by L.S.S. O'Malley that it is a modern creation for the purposes of revenue administration and not a part of the original village constitution. He says, "The (village) headman has a quasi-official position and his name bespeaks of his recent origin; it is *lambardar*, from *lambar*, the Indian pronunciation of the English word 'number'. The reason is that a man was appointed by Government for each village, whose duty it was, and still is, to pay the land revenue assessed on the village and to collect the due share of it from each proprietary family, and that he was given a number in the Government register."²³

Owing to the existence of the *panchayats* and the absence of village headmen other than the semi-official headmen, the village constitution is sometimes described as democratic; but actually the village constitution appears to be more like that of an oligarchy. We have already noticed in the earlier section that the existence of extreme stratification precluded the possibility of a true democracy, although it is true that the various castes and communities were represented on the village council. Then again, in the landlord type of villages,

²³ L.S.S. O'Malley, *India's Social Heritage*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

the village is owned by the single owner or group of owners. In such a case the village oligarchy does not include tenants, artisans, shopkeepers, and others who are not the members of the proprietary body. They belong to the village, but being outside the "brotherhood" or "bhaiyachara" are subordinate to the co-proprietors, who even decide whether they may have houses on the residential site. In such a situation, there are in fact two classes of men in the village, one with proprietary rights, the other without them, and control rests exclusively with the former.

The Ownership of Land in the Village Communities

In connection with our discussion of the village constitution, it is necessary for us here to say a few words about the ownership of land in the village communities. It is to be noticed here that although the village communities played a very important role in the economy of the village, the ownership of land was not communal, as some have supposed. We shall not go into the long controversy about the ownership and nature of the title of the State to land. The matter has been the subject of controversy almost since the beginning of the British rule in India. (We shall discuss this issue from another point of view when we discuss the characteristics of Indian feudalism in a later section). For purposes of our discussion about the village constitution, we need only to point out here that scholars have come to the conclusion that although the life of the villagers was to a large extent controlled by the village communities, "Cultivation itself does not appear to have been, in the historic period at all events, carried on by the collective labour of the village peasantry. The fields were broken up into holdings, each ploughed and sown and reaped by one of the families resident in the

village with the labour of the members of the family and the implements and cattle belonging to them. And over these lands each family had a hereditary claim, and these separate family claims or holdings were unequal in area."²⁴

U.N. Ghosal, who is an authority on the ancient Indian land system, is also of the above opinion, when he says, "It thus appears that the private ownership of land was an established institution among the Indo-Aryans in the oldest times to which their history can be traced."²⁵ He further says, "Now it is the relatively advanced stage of social evolution that the Vedic Aryans are found to occupy at the dawn of their history. Regarding the early forms of property in land, while the view made classical by Sir Henry Maine and Emile de Laveleye maintained collective ownership of land to have preceded the individual ownership, it was authoritatively held in later times that individual ownership was the oldest form of property, while very recently it has been argued that complex conditions of primitive communities preclude the fixing of convenient levels like 'communitistic' and 'individualistic' to their idea of property. Whatever that may be, the evidence of the Rg Veda Samhita shows that among the Indo-Aryans at any rate the arable land was held in individual or in family ownership, while communal ownership was probably confined only to grass-lands lying on the boundaries of the fields."²⁶

Radhakamal Mukherjee also says, "...extent of communal control and ownership of land probably applied to what was 'no man's land'; the grass land which served to separate one

²⁴ K.S. Shelvankar, *Problem of India* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1943), p. 74.

²⁵ U.N. Ghosal, *The Agrarian System of Ancient India* (Calcutta: Published by the University of Calcutta, 1930), p. 82.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

plot from another and was used as village common for purposes of pasture for cattle.”²⁷

Now in such a situation how did the village communities control production? In the development of the Indian village system we find two variations : (1) a village where the holdings are from time to time thrown together and re-distributed afresh on some principle of need or capacity among the resident peasants, and (2) the village where such a re-distribution had either not been in vogue from the time of its foundation, owing to the character of the relations of its founding members, or had since been given up. In every case the families had a claim on land distinct from the village. The acute observer of the Indian phenomenon, Sir Henry Maine marked this aspect of the village constitution, when he said, “Among the non-Aryan peasantry who form a considerable proportion of the population in the still thinly peopled territory called the Central Provinces, the former high road of Mahratta brigandage, there are examples of the occasional removal of the entire arable mark from one part of the village domain to another, and of the periodical re-distribution of plots within the cultivated area. But I have not obtained any information of any systematic removal, and still less of any periodical re-distribution of the cultivated lands, when the cultivators are of Aryan origin. But experienced Indian officials have told me that though the practice of re-distribution may be extinct, the tradition of such a practice often remains, and the disuse of it is sometimes complained of as a grievance.”²⁸

It is necessary to point out the different possible implications of the ownership of land. From the above mentioned nature of the ownership of land, that is, the possibility of clear demar-

²⁷ P.K. Roy, as quoted by, *Agricultural Economics of Bengal* (Calcutta: Published by the University of Calcutta, 1947), p. 186.

²⁸ Maine, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.

cation of plots and their use in the inheritances, at least for a period, by individuals and families, some writers have assumed that there existed private property. What is meant by this is that individual or family plots of land could be demarcated from the earliest historic period. But it would be wrong to suppose from this that private property as it is understood in modern capitalism existed from the earliest period. The basic assumption of private property in modern capitalism is that the individual has the right to dispose of the means of production and their products and with this right of disposal is included the right to transfer or sell the property. In this sense there was no private property at all in the earlier phases of production in India. Only with the beginning of traded surplus was there any beginning of private property. We found above that the village community had the right of re-distribution of the village lands and this very fact implies that the private property that existed in the Indian villages should be understood in a restricted sense.

SECTION IV

The Village Industry

A discussion of the village industry in India is also important in our analysis of the village organization. The existence of village industry side by side with agriculture made the Indian villages in many respects urban-like in its organization and therefore an analysis of it will throw light on the relationship of the social classes within the village.

The industrial organization during the pre-British period clearly reflected the basic features of the agrarian order, which was the dominant sphere of production. Its distinctive characteristic was a cleavage corresponding to the division between the class of agricultural producers and consumers. There were two sets of craftsmen, one administering to the wants of the peasants and the other to the non-agricultural classes. The peasants generally satisfied their demand for agricultural implements, which they could not produce themselves, from village artisans. Besides the demand of the peasants for agricultural implements, there was a demand for luxury goods coming from the opulent aristocracy, who lived in the towns. The pre-British Indian industries can therefore be divided into two major divisions: (1) Village Industries, (2) Urban Industries.

L.S.S. O'Malley has pointed out. "The organization of villages as separate self-sufficing industrial units was a natural consequence of the almost complete absence of roads and the unsettled condition of the country. In many parts, the villages still nestle under the forts or within the walls built to protect them against raids ; in Berar the village forts are often 30 feet high and so large that the whole population with its herds could take refuge in them. Their isolation has only been broken down during the last seventy years."²⁹

Probably because of such an organization of industries within the boundaries of the village, the Committee of the House of Commons, which enquired about the affairs of the East India Company in 1810, remarked, "A village geographically considered is a tract comprising some hundreds, or thousands of acres of arable and waste land. Politically viewed it resembles a corporation or township."³⁰

²⁹ O'Malley, *India's Social Heritage*, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-113.

³⁰ J.N. Das Gupta, as quoted by, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74.

The peculiar feature of the Indian village community was that the majority of the artisans were the servants of the village. The term *servant* must be understood here in a special sense. They were, so to speak, the servants of the village, because these different artisans held agricultural and homestead lands rent-free from the village, or at a reduced rental. Again one of the chief sources of these artisans consisted in the fixed share of the produce, each year, which was paid to them by each cultivator. For this they were required to render services to the cultivators. Thus the carpenter was required to repair all agricultural implements, the potter to supply all pottery, the blacksmith, all iron implements, and so on. Because of this nature of the organization of industry in the village communities, the village artisans had no incentives to improve their technical skill. The villages offered the artisans economic security and the peasants were bound by custom to buy practically all their agricultural implements from the village artisans. This system barred all external competition and was responsible for the lack of the increase in the technical skill of the village artisan. "The office of the village artisan being hereditary, it stereotyped the whole life of the village. It was no doubt a very good device for insuring that the services required for the village would be regularly provided for, especially during troublous times, but, at the same time, it insured against progress in the methods of the artisans. To begin with the artisan, who did all the miscellaneous duties connected with his occupations in the village, did not specialize, and the division of labour was extremely limited. The proficiency of the artisan in his craft could not be expected to be great. It also protected the artisan from external competition. For a cultivator was not likely to buy his pots from an outside potter—even though his wares were superior—if he had been paying the village potter to supply them to him. The same absence

of competition resulted in an entire absence of localization of industries in India.”³¹

The examination of the artisan's position in relation to the village community will justify our claim that the organization of the village constitution was oligarchic. This was especially the case with the co-sharer villages or the *bhaiyachara* villages. In the *bhaiyachara* villages a certain number of families are traditionally regarded as having descended from the founder of the village and they are, so to speak, the proprietors of the village. The village management, therefore, is their particular responsibility. In the village council, some representatives from the artisan class may be included, but the sole responsibility of the village affairs is that of the proprietors and this was always tacitly recognized. The artisans therefore have been regarded as “strangers within the gate”, as Sir George Birdwood puts it. He says, “The typical Hindu village consists exclusively of husbandmen; but as husbandry and manufacture cannot exist without each other, the village had to receive a number of artisans as member of its governing body. But they are all ‘strangers within the gate’, who reside in the village solely for the convenience of the husbandmen on a sort of service contract. It is a perpetual contract, but in the lapse of 3,000 years, the artisans have constantly terminated their connection with the village, or have had to provide for sons some other place, and they at once sought their livelihood in the towns which began to spring up everywhere round the centres of Government, and of the foreign commerce of the country. It is in this way that the great polytechnical cities of India have been formed.”³²

³¹ D.R. Gadgil, *op. cit*, pp. 12-13.

³² George C. M. Birdwood, *Industrial Arts of India* (London: Chapman Hall, pref., 1880), p. 137.

SECTION V

The Break Up of the Village

So far we have discussed the nature of the traditional Indian village constitution. This traditional village constitution began to break up with the impact of the British rule, although we shall invariably find in existence many features of the traditional Indian village constitution, where the village constitution is still little affected by the British rule. The countryside has been opened up by improved roads, railways, and last of all by the motor bus. The villagers are no longer isolated and self-supporting to the same extent as they were before the British rule. Improved methods of communications and greater opportunities for employment outside the village have made labour more mobile. Village industries in many cases failed to compete with the machine-made products. Vast number of village artisans were driven to agriculture or change of occupation of some other type. British rule not only meant the break up of the village, but also the break up of the traditional village constitution. British rule introduced, in the first place, a new system of land by which they created landed proprietors, on the English pattern, who did not exist during the pre-British period. We need not here examine the motives which impelled the British to introduce such a system of tenure in Bengal on their assumption of political power. It will suffice here to say that the notions introduced by the British in the land tenure system were unsuited to the soil and that they greatly hastened the disintegration of the traditional village constitution. British rule moreover introduced new notions of ownership of property and human rights through the legal codes, educational institutions and economic and business organizations established by them and thereby the traditional village constitution gradually lost its power. The villagers increasingly began to use the legal institutions set up by the British for the settlement of dis-

putes, instead of the village *panchayat* and the village panchayat thus found itself completely helpless. Not only the economic aspect of the village life was affected by the British rule, but it also deprived the village communities of their elementary rights of the management of the local municipal functions, such as police and sanitation. The British created a complicated bureaucracy to look after even such elementary works and the village communities were thus shorn of all functions.

The impact of the British rule in the break up of the village constitution has not been uniform in all parts of India. In those parts of the country which are still removed from the industrial centres, or in those parts which are unaffected by improved methods of communication, the village communities still retain their former vigour. But in some other parts, according L.S.S. O'Malley, the impact of the British rule has gone so far that the old village constitution retains only the village headman the village accountant, and menial servants. The change has gone very far in some areas. In some districts, for instance (Amraoti in Berar), it is said that little remains of the old village community except the village headman, the village accountant, and the menial servants.³³

Though these village officials are found in many parts of India and Pakistan, the disintegration of the village organization has been so complete in East Pakistan that here even these village officials are not to be found.

³³ O'Malley, *India's Social Heritage*, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115. For this section as well as for the section on "The Village Constitution" I have mainly depended on O'Malley, as his description of the "break up of the village" seemed to me the standard one applicable to all parts of India.

CHAPTER II

INDIAN FEUDALISM

The characteristic features of the Indian land tenure in pre-British India were so different from that of the European that some writers on Indian problems are unwilling to use the term "feudalism"¹ to characterise the pre-British Indian State and society. But in recent years the term is being widely used by writers on Indian problems. If we keep in mind the characteristic differences of the two systems, there is no reason why we should not use this familiar term for the convenience of our study.

The understanding of the differences between Indian and European feudalisms is the key to understanding the problem of economic and social development in the Indian subcontinent. A comparison of the characteristic features of the European feudal system with those of the Indian would show some similarities. But although the structural bases show some similarities they

¹ "Some have objected to the use of the word "feudalism" for Indian conditions, on the grounds that the characteristic land tenure system of feudal Europe did not obtain in India." W.C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1948), p. 308. But if we take feudalism to mean a type of culture and society where land holding is the basis of political and economic power, I see no reason, why the term "feudalism" be applied to European conditions only. However, it must be admitted that we should not expect the presence of all the features of European feudalism when we apply this term to Indian conditions. The term has associations from European history which must be modified before it can be used also for India. A prominent medievalist, R.H. Hilton says, "Is not feudal society after all fundamentally determined by the relations between a landowning military aristocracy on the one hand and vast class of peasant producers, working individual family holdings, but also organized into village or hamlet communities, on the other? I am aware that there have been many important modifications made to this simple picture but I maintain that the picture remains fundamentally true for even economies of different character, in so far as it defines the basic social relations between the two main classes of feudal Europe."—*Economic History Review*, XVIII, 1948.

differ in some fundamental respects. There were important differences in the relations which existed between the different elements of the two agrarian schemes. Because of such differences the two systems developed differently. European feudalism gave birth to capitalism, while Indian feudalism of its own accord failed to do so.

This brings us to the examination of the relations which existed between the different constituents of Indian feudalism.

It has been pointed out repeatedly that the British came to India with differing notions of the ownership of land and the system of tenure. It has been argued that the early British administrators failed to appreciate the difference between the English system of land tenure and the Indian. Due to their "misconceptions", (it was not purely a "misconception", as some writers have argued, but an inevitable process of the new order brought in by the British), they introduced their own ideas to the land tenure system through the legal system, actual administration, educational institutions and also by the creation of a new class of landowners on the British pattern and by various other means. Such an imposition of the British notion gradually led to the disintegration of the traditional Indian system. The history of the British capitalist enterprise is closely associated with this disintegration of the old Indian system and its replacement by a new one.

Here the question arises: In what fundamental respects did the British notions of land tenure differ from that of the Indian?

The fundamental difference between the English and the Indian idea of land tenure lies in the different conceptions of royal power.

It has been pointed out that the king under European feudalism combined in himself authority over all persons and things in

his kingdom. When the king's dominium was delegated under the vows of allegiance to a number of barons and fief-holders of different degrees, and a hierarchy of authority was created; the power and the rights that were passed on from the superior to the inferior were the power and rights over things (i.e. land of a given area) as well as persons connected with it.

In India, the king did not, in theory, create subordinate owners of land, because he himself was not, in theory, the supreme owner of land. What he delegated to his intermediaries was only the specific and individual right of *zamin*, i.e., the revenue-collecting power. Dr. Radha Kumud Mukherjee has quoted a number of ancient texts in support of the above view. He says, "We find the law laid down by Jaimini in his *Purva-Mimansa* (VI,7,3), stating that the King cannot give away the earth because it is not his exclusive property but is common to all beings enjoying the fruits of their own labour on it. It belongs to all alike...."²

Sabara Avami (C. 5th century A.D.) commenting on this passage says, "The king cannot make a gift of his kingdom, for it is not his, as he is entitled only to a share of the produce by reason of his sovereignty and by reason of his affording protection to his subjects."³ Many such other passages can be cited from the Hindu scriptures to illustrate the differing notions of Indian land tenure from that of the European. Above all, the essential fact to be remembered is that unlike Europe the feudal lords in India did not own the land. They were in theory and practice mere revenue farmers appointed and dismissable by the central government. It is true that at periods of decay of the central authority these revenue farmers tended to consolidate

² *Report of the United Provinces Zamindari Abolition Committee*, as quoted by, (Allahabad, India: Superintendent, Printing and Stationery, U.P. Government, 1948), p. 64.

³ See footnote number 2.

their position and the offices tended to be hereditary. But so long as the central government remained strong, it retained its firm grip upon its officers. This aspect of the different type of ownership of land in India could not escape the notice of Francois Bernier in the seventeenth century. He says, "..... the King as the proprietor of the land, makes over a certain quantity to military men, as an equivalent for their pay; and this grant is called *jah-ghir*, or as in Turkey, *timar*; the word *jah-ghir* signifying the spot from which to draw, or the place of salary. Similar grants are made to governors, in lieu of also for the support of their troops, on condition that they pay certain sums annually to the King out of any surplus revenue that the land may yield. The lands not so granted are retained by the King as the peculiar domains of his house, and are seldom, if ever, given in the way of *jah-ghir*; and upon these domains he keeps contractors, who are also bound to pay him an annual rent."⁴

It has been argued that due to their "misconceptions" the British introduced their own conceptions of land tenure in Bengal by the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793. But it seems to the present writer that the British had a very clear conception⁵ of the ownership of land. How clear was the conception of the

⁴ Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire*, Transl. by Archibald Constable and revised by V. A. Smith (London, etc. : Oxford University Press, 1914), p. 225.

⁵ Thus remarked Lord Cornwallis, the author of the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793, "The proprietors of lands should be attached to us from motives of self-interest. A landholder who is secured in the quiet enjoyment of profitable state could have no motive for wishing for a change. On the contrary, if the rents of his lands are raised in proportion to their improvement, if he is liable to be dispossessed should he refuse to pay the increase required of him, or if he is threatened with imprisonment or confiscation of his property on account of balances due to the Government upon an assessment which his lands are unequal to pay, he will readily listen to any offers which are likely to bring about a change that cannot place him in a worse situation, but which holds out to him hopes of a better." R.K. Mukerjee, *Indian Land System*, as quoted by P.K. Roy, *Agricultural Economies of Bengal* (Calcutta: Published by the University of Calcutta, 1947), Part-I, p. 207.

British of the ownership of land in India is illustrated by two quotations from the writings of two Britishers which were published before 1793. Thus William Bolts, merchant, alderman or Judge of the Hon. Mayor's Court, Calcutta wrote in 1772-1775, "The whole of what was collected, was the property of the Emperor, by whom the whole country (excepting such parts as were assigned on temporary grants to the Crown pensioners, called Jagueedars, and the charity land, allotted to religious purposes, by the denomination Bhurmuttero, and a variety of other hard names, under the general title of Bazy Zemee, which would require whole pages to explain) was allotted for the purpose of governing, and collecting the revenue thereof, to such persons as he pleased, either as superintendants (sic) or farmers of the revenues, or governors, under the different ranks of Rajahs, Subahdars, Nazims, Nabobs, Zamindars, etc., who, whatever they might collect, were seldom molested by any officers from the king's dewan, or Receiver General of Revenues, so long as they regularly accounted for the sums at which their provinces were respectively rated in the King's books, and satisfactorily gratified the Dewan and other great officers of the court."⁶

Again, in the "Anonymous Account of Bengal—Warren Hastings MSS", British Museum, Add. MS. 29207, as quoted by Monckton Jones, we find the following description of the revenue system of Bengal around probably 1775 A.D. :—"The system now (probably 1775 A.D.) pursued in the management of the revenues is to farm the lands either to the Zamindars themselves or to their persons for a specified sum, the risk and profit and loss to be theirs. In the latter case the Zamindars receive a

⁶ William Bolts, (Merchant, Alderman or Judge of the Hon. Mayor's Court, Calcutta) *Considerations on Indian Affairs; Particularly respecting the Present State of Bengal and its Dependencies*. (London: Printed for J. Almon, etc., 1772-75), Vol-I, p. 149. Out of print and rare literature. To be found in Columbia University Library, Special Collections Room.

fixed allowance in ready money and cannot be deprived of their Zamindaries for any deficiencies which may happen.”⁷

Again, William Bolts says, “Since the subversion of the Mogul empire, the lands of every district of course became the property of each respective usurper, so long as by their own power they can maintain possession; and so long as each usurper deemed himself, and in fact was a real sovereign. Thus upon the English East India Company’s assuming the Dewaunee, we find that they also, in turn declare themselves to have become the *sovereigns* of a rich and potent kingdom; of the revenues of which they likewise declare themselves not only the *Collectors* but *Proprietors*.”⁸

The above descriptions of the revenue system of Bengal refer to the conditions just at the time of British ascendancy. It is clearly discernible that the “landlords” had consolidated their position at the time when the Mughal power declined. Bernier was giving his account of the revenue system of India when the Mughal power was at its zenith.

The structures of Indian and European feudalism show certain similarities but because of the difference in the notion of the relations between the constituents of the two agrarian schemes, the two systems as a consequence developed differently. We shall keep in mind the above fundamental difference between the Indian and European notions of feudalism and shall then proceed to the examination of the relationships those existed between the different constituents of the Indian feudal order.

During the period just preceding the British ascendancy, we find in Bengal the following three important constituents of the feudal order : (1) The *Cultivator*, as organized in the *village*

⁷ Monckton Jones, *Hastings in Bengal*, Oxford Historical and Literary Studies, Volume-IX (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1918), p. 29.

⁸ William Bolts, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

communities (2) *The Revenue Collectors*, known as the *Zamin-dars* (3) *The State*, as represented by the *King*.

Ruler and Intermediaries : The actual cultivator as organized in the village community was one of the most important constituents of the Indian feudal order—the other two were the ruler and the intermediaries. Due to the difference in the notions of the royal power, Indian feudalism could not create fief-holders of the European pattern. The intermediaries between the ruler and the actual cultivator (as organized in the village communities) were therefore revenue-collectors and *not proprietors of the soil*—and this theory almost corresponded with the practice. But we find in Indian history that such revenue officers consolidated their position, whenever the centralized administration declined. This we find in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries when we hear of the “Chief’s Estates” in the northern India with the decline of the centralized administration at the end of the Hindu period.⁹ In the similar way, we find that with the decline of the centralized Mughal administration these revenue collectors were consolidating their position and the office of revenue collection often became hereditary. (The centralized Mughal administration began to rapidly decline after the death of the Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707 A.D.)

We should note here that there have been changes in the techniques of the collection of revenue during different periods of Indian history, especially during the Muslim rule. But changes in the techniques of the collection of revenue did not mean a change in the fundamental notion of royal power in relation to the land. However, changes in the techniques of collection of revenue meant changes in the organization of the feudal structure.

⁹ U.N. Ghosal, *The Agrarian System in Ancient India* (Calcutta: Published by the University of Calcutta, 1930).

Muslims did not introduce an altogether new revenue administration in India. They had their own theories of revenue collection, which did not differ fundamentally from those of the Indian. They found at hand a system of revenue collection, which they took over and worked through the indigenous Hindu agency existing at that time. But they proceeded gradually, by alteration of the methods of assessment and collection of the revenue, to evolve a more elaborate and rational system of revenue collection. The old system of paying the land revenue by division of crop gave way in time to the system of cash payments, under which revenue ceased to be a levy upon actual produce and became a tax upon the productive powers of the soil, computed by the measurement of the cultivable area and the estimate of the probable yield.

At the closing years of the seventeenth century, i.e., during the period just preceding the British ascendancy, the Muslim rule introduced a new technique in the method of the collection of revenue. Internal disorder and consequent financial strain drove the government of the day to seek more convenient means of realizing its income. The practice of official levy on each village was abandoned. The Mughal provinces were divided into large tracts and the privilege of collection of the revenue in each of these areas was made over by contract to a person who agreed for a period of years to pay annually a predetermined sum which represented in a rough way the amount of revenue which each estate was expected to yield. The farmer under the terms of the contract was granted extensive administrative powers over the villages comprised in his estate, and it was he, and not an official of the government, who now settled with the headman the revenue claim for each village. In short, the previous elaborate machinery developed during the reign of early Muslim Emperors, especially during the reign of Akbar was dis-

carded, and in return for fixed annual payment practically all the functions of the government were handed over to a contractor, whose position and authority made him to all intents and purposes a landlord. What the cultivator had now to pay was determined by the will of the farmer of revenue and not by the act of the State, and the progressive decline of authority at the centre and the relaxation of control gave this contractor-cum-revenue farmer the opportunity to tighten his grip on his estate and securing for himself the status of a landlord and a landowner. In a previous paragraph we have observed this situation of the revenue system of Bengal in the quotation from William Bolts writing in 1772-1775 A.D., just at the time of the ascendancy of British power in India. We find from the quotations of William Bolts that he fully understood the implications of the fundamental nature of the revenue system of Bengal and fully realized how the revenue farmers were consolidating their position with the decline of the Mughal power. Therefore, there is no room for so-called "misconceptions" of the revenue system of Bengal by the British. The fact is that as a foreign power the British required a powerful class of landlords in Bengal to buttress their administration and therefore they introduced the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793, and for the first time created a class of landlords with proprietary rights in land on the British pattern. That the British administrators fully understood the implication of their act will be evident from the following quotation. Governor General Lord William Bentick remarked in 1829, "If security was wanting against extensive popular tumult or revolution I should say that Permanent Settlement, though a failure in many respects, has this great advantage at least, of having created a vast body of rich landed proprietors deeply interested in the continuance of British Dominion and having complete control over the mass of the people."¹⁰

The characteristics of Indian feudalism have been summed up in the following sentence of K.S. Shelvankar, which is often quoted,—“Indian feudalism remained fiscal and military in character, it was not manorial.”¹¹ The essence of the difference between Indian and European feudalism is the differing notions of royal power and because of that the peasant in the Indian economy occupied a different position in the social order from his European counterpart under feudalism. The agrarian history of Europe shows a direct conflict between the manorial lord and the peasantry over the question of land and labour services. But such a conflict, the Indian agrarian system never faced. In the first place, the peasant could always abscond to hitherto uncultivated plots of lands, whenever the oppression and exactions of his overlord became unbearable. In the second place, because of this very reason, the lord was generally satisfied to exact his utmost from the peasant in the shape of produce, without concerning himself with the economic and technical questions of increasing production.¹²

¹⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New York: John Day Company, 1945), p. 304.

¹¹ K. S. Shelvankar, *Problem of India* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1940), p. 79.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

CHAPTER III

CHANGING URBAN PATTERNS

SECTION I

The State and Urbanization

The type of village community that we find in the poet Mukundaram's description continued more or less in the same form until the beginning of the British rule; and indeed, as we have observed, in some places till today. We have seen that such a village constitution existed in India for about 3,000 years.¹ In feudal Europe we likewise find such a more or less static social relationship. The static social stratification arose out of the static Indian village communities. Now the question arises—How was it possible for feudal Europe to overcome the traditionalism of the village communities and why was it not possible for India to have a development parallel like Europe? The question brings us to the very heart of the problem. We shall therefore discuss in this chapter, why European feudalism could outgrow its traditionalism and was in a position to give birth to capitalism and greater social mobility and why Indian feudalism of its own accord failed to effect that transition to capitalism.

One of the main causes of the stability of Indian society is to be found in the character of the State in India. The character of the State in India was in its turn determined by the social economy from which it emerged. The development of towns in western Europe during the Middle Ages provided the

¹ George C.M. Birdwood, *Industrial Arts of India* (London : Chapman Hall, pref., 1880), p. 137.

basis for the development of a commercial bourgeoisie, who ultimately brought in the capitalist mode of production. That is to say, the peculiar development of towns and also a kind of State associated with such a development was responsible for the capitalist era in Europe. In India such a development did not take place until the beginning of the British rule. Significant social changes of course were going on in India as in the west, but what was happening in the West was different from what was happening in India.

It would seem that the key cause of such a differential development is that the Indian social economy was able to provide a persisting basis for a centralized State, while the western European economy did not. Our further point is that such a centralized State in India provided the basis for a sort of stable urbanization, but did not provide for the development of towns on western lines.

In what respects did the social economy in India differ from those of Europe?

The character of the State and the social economy in India and western Europe differed because irrigation played a very important role in the economy of India. The Indian bourgeoisie could not capture power in the towns because the relations between the State, the town, and the village, which prevailed in India, were different from those of Europe. The difference in the relationships has been attributed to the existence of an extensive irrigation and public works system in India, while such a system did not exist in Europe. In India the seasonal monsoons were the only rainfall and this rainfall was confined only to some parts of the country. The Indian agrarian system therefore was dependent upon extensive public works and irrigation. The primary function of the State was to look after the water supply—

to sink wells and build canals, tanks and reservoirs. Its power was built upon the control of water works. And, to control, regulate and supervise public works, and collect land tax, the State stationed its agents at various local centres, which became the towns. The State kept firm control over the towns which were the centres of its activity. Feudal Europe was even more an agrarian society than India; but due to a more even rainfall throughout the year, irrigation systems were of much less importance to agriculture in Europe than in India. The growth of towns never played the same important role in India as in Europe. Max Weber brings out this distinction between the development in the West and the East in the following words:

“The distinction is based on the fact that in the cultural evolution of Egypt, western Asia, India, and China the question of irrigation was crucial. The water question conditioned the existence of bureaucracy, the compulsory service of the dependent classes upon the functioning of the bureaucracy of the king. That the king also expressed his power in the form of military monopoly is the basis of the distinction between the military organization of Asia and that of the west. In the first case the royal official and the army are from the beginning the central figure of the process, while in the west both were originally absent.”²

Again, Karl H. Niebyl says,

“Western or Occidental Society represents a mode of production which is predicated upon sufficient and seasonally adequate rain water supply. The moderate climate and the general geological and geophysical conditions of Europe represent regions of that type. No such conditions prevailed in Asia.

² Max Weber, *General Economic History*, Transl. by Frank H. Knight (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1950), pp. 321-322.

"In the wake of early migrations, the people pressed beyond the mountain barriers into India, China and Mesopotamia among many other places, where water was provided by seasonal floods. The water structures could be built only by common, total, effort, and certainly not by individual small particles of social organizations. But in fundamental contradiction to either of the methods of primitive economies, or of the occidental mode of production, these water structures as pre-conditions of social production could be built only on a scale so large that it transcended the capacity of all the existing forms of social organization."³

A single village or a group of villages could not perform this vast task of irrigation. Therefore an organization like the State (which was necessarily the only social organization having political control over a vast area) had to take on these large scale irrigation works. Because of this the Indian State developed a highly complicated bureaucracy and tended to be centralized. Max Weber maintains that in ancient Mesopotamia and India we meet with relations which verge upon the establishment of cities in the western sense, but such beginnings in the growth of cities disappeared as great kingdoms arose on the basis of water regulation. He says, "In India we meet with relations which verge upon the establishment of a city in the western sense, namely, the combination of self equipment and legal

³ Karl H. Niebyl, *An Outline of the Historical and Material Background of Society To-Day* (Honolulu: 1945, mimeographed copy to be found in the New York Public Library), pp. 118-120. Cf. "Irrigation was unnecessary in most parts of Europe, especially difficult in the southern peninsulas because of the steepness of the slopes and the loose character of the soil. Extensive drainage works were sometimes used in Italy to prevent the rotting of crops during the rainy seasons." M.M. Knight, *Economic History of Europe to the End of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass., Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926), p. 65. It is however to be noted here that the tribes arriving in the river valleys of the Indus, Hwang Ho, and Euphrates and Tigris represented primitive social organizations with varying degrees of tribal democracy. References to the remnants of such social organizations are to be found in the Rig-Veda. It is only with their permanent settlement that they developed a new social organization necessary for an agriculture dependent upon extensive use of irrigation.

citizenship; one who could furnish an elephant for the army is in the free city of Vaicali a full citizen. In ancient Mesopotamia, too, the knights carried on war with each other and established cities with autonomous administration. But in the one case as in the other these beginnings later disappear as the great kingdom arises on the basis of water regulation. Hence only in the west did the development come to complete maturity.”⁴

That irrigation played a very important role in the rise and downfall of the centralized States has been accepted by many competent observers of the Indian phenomenon. A very capable recent writer on Indian problems, K.S. Shelvankar says,

“There was an essential difference in the interrelations which prevailed in Europe and in India between the State, town and country. For the agrarian system of India, public works and irrigation works were a necessity. It could only be met by an organization with the resources and the authority of the State. And to control, regulate and supervise public works, and the collection of land tax the State was compelled to station its agents at the various local centres, which were the towns.”⁵

Sir Henry Maine writing 80 years ago recognized the importance of irrigation in the Indian economy and pointed out the cause of the different developments in India and Europe in the following words:

“The condition of agriculture in a tropical country are so widely different from those which can be at any period be supposed to have determined cultivation in northern and central Europe as to forbid us to look to resemblances in India, at once widely extended and exact, to the Teutonic three-

⁴ Max Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

⁵ K.S. Shelvankar, *Problem of India* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1940), pp. 110-111.

field system. Indeed as the great agent of production in a tropical country is water, very great dissimilarities in modes of cultivation are produced with India itself by relative proximity to running streams and relative exposure to the periodical rainfall."⁶

I am not well informed about irrigation works maintained by the State during the pre-Aryan period, but the earliest archaeological evidences and inscriptions of the post-Dravidian period show that the state in India maintained a vast net work of irrigation works. The *Rig-Veda*⁷ refers to irrigation works main-

⁶ Sir Henry Maine, *Village Communities in the East and West* (London : John Murray, Albemarle St., 1872), p. 108.

⁷ For a good account of the irrigation works in ancient India, *vide.*, Atindra Nath Bose, *Social and Rural Economy of Northern India*, Vol-I, (Calcutta : Published by the University of Calcutta, 1942), Chapter on "Famine and Irrigation", Chapter—VIII, pp. 95-115. He says, "Later epigraphic records supply copious illustrations of magnificent state enterprises. Instances in early inscriptions are few and far between. Still we do not altogether lack examples of private initiative for sinking wells and reservoirs under royal encouragement.As a protagonist of irrigation schemes, the Mauryas do not stand on Asoka's Edicts alone. They took a vigorous interest in the irrigation of the countryside. Magasthenes enumerates a class of officers distinguished from those entrusted with administration of the city and of the military, who 'superintend the rivers, measure the land, as is done in Egypt, and inspect the sluices by which water is let out from the main canal into their branches, so that everyone may have an equal supply of it'. (Str. XV, i, 50) The Junagadh Rock Inscription of Rudradaman states how the Sudarsana lake excavated by the governor of Chandra Gupta Maurya, restored and adorned with conduits by Asoka's governor, had subsequently an enormous breach and was dried up; and 'when the people in their despair of having the dam rebuilt were loudly lamenting', the Saka prince undertook the reconstruction in the teeth of ministerial opposition with a large outlay of capital and furnished the lake with a 'natural dam, well-planned conduits, drains, and means to guard against foul matter'. The dimensions of the dam (420 cubits X 420 cubits X 75 cubits) give an idea of the vastness of the reservoir, and this was constructed by the Mauryas even in an outlying province. King Kharavela of Kalinga claims to have similarly strengthened the embankments of springs and lakes with a large expense, in the famous inscription of Hathigumpha. And Rudradaman was not the solitary instance of his line in magnificent irrigation enterprises. A Sanchi inscription of the 3rd century A.D. records the excavation of a well by a Saka chief (mahadandanayaka) of perennial water-supply for (salilah sarvadhigamyah sada); an inscription of the 2nd century in Kathiawad says that a general (senapati) of the time of the Ksatrapa Rudrasimha caused a well to be dug and embanked in the village of Rasopadra for the welfare

tained by the State, while speaking about the famines. In the *Arthashastra*⁸ of Kautilya we find references to this important State enterprise. Any observer⁹ who visited India in the past was struck by the vast irrigation works maintained by the State. The highly "sociologically" minded French traveller, Francois Bernier, visited India during the later part of the seventeenth century. The fact, that a different notion of land ownership and that a vast centralized bureaucracy (in Bernier's words they were the "Timaroits,¹⁰ governors and Revenue contractors") subsisting on the State revenue created an altogether different society from that of the west, could not escape the notice of this observer. Bernier also pointed out the importance of irrigation in Egypt, Mesopotamia and India and spoke about the fundamental differences between the East and West arising out of such an environment.¹¹

and comfort of all living beings (sarvasatvanam hita sukhartham)."—Atindranath Bose, *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103.

⁸ See footnote number 7 above.

⁹ Megasthenes, Huen-Sang, Ibn-Batuta, Alberuni, Bernier, Heber, any of these acute observers who visited in the past were struck by the magnificent public works and irrigation works maintained by the State.

¹⁰ Bernier uses this term "Timaroits" from the Turkish word "timar" meaning those officers of the State who were given large tracts of land for farming on their own account as part or full payment of their salary. These officers used to appropriate the surplus revenues from such lands themselves or turn them over to the State's coffers.

¹¹ Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire*, Transl. by Archibald Constable and revised by V.A. Smith (London, etc. : Oxford University Press, 1914), pp. 227-228. Compare Bernier's account with that of Chinese society given by Max Weber : "In contrast, the Middle Eastern cities such as Babylon, at an early time were completely at the mercy of the royal bureaucracy because of canal construction and administration. The same held for the Chinese city despite the paucity of Chinese central administration. The prosperity of the Chinese city did not primarily depend on the citizen's enterprising spirit in political and economic ventures but rather upon the imperial administration, especially the administration of rivers."

"Our occidental bureaucracy is of recent origin and in part has been learned from the experiences of the autonomous city states. The imperial bureaucracy of China is very ancient. The Chinese city was predominantly of

It is important here to note that on the assumption of political sovereignty in India, the British did not pay much attention to the vital importance of irrigation. This was probably because irrigation did not play an important role in the economy of Bengal, where they first took political power. Only during the later part of the nineteenth century did the British administrators begin to realize the great significance of irrigation to Indian economy and during this period several books appeared,¹² written by experienced British officials pointing out its importance in India's agrarian economy. Karl Wittfogel has developed his "hydraulic theory" of the origin of great States in Asia. Recently in an article entitled "The Ruling Bureaucracy of Oriental Despotism: A Phenomenon that Paralysed Marx"¹³ he has pointed out the importance of irrigation in Indian economy. Karl Marx and F. Engels a century back also

rational administration, as its very name indicated."—Max Weber, *Religion of China*, Transl. and edited by Hans H. Gerth (Glencoe, Ill., Free Press, 1951), p. 16.

¹² A. Cotton, *Public Works in India*, their importance; with suggestions for their expansion and improvement (London: Richardson Brothers, 23, Cornhill, 1854), Chapter X, "Water", pp. 169-269.

A.K. Connel, *The Economic Revolution of India and the Public Works Policy* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1883), Part III, Irrigation Works, pp. 83-138.

George Chesney, *Indian Polity* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1894), Chapter XVIII "Irrigation Works", pp. 285-299.

The following *Pamphlet* on causes of famines in India also points out the importance of irrigation works :—

A. Cotton, *The Madras Famine* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., Stationer's Hall Court, 1877?), to be found in Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, under the heading *Pamphlets* (954-Z7, Vol-VI).

Criticizing the neglect of irrigation works by the British officials, Col. A. Cotton says, "Public works have been almost entirely neglected throughout India.The motto has been: 'Do nothing, have nothing done, let nobody do anything. Bear any loss, let the people die of famine, let hundreds of lakhs be lost in revenue for want of water, or roads, rather than do anything'."—A. Cotton, *Public Works in India*, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

¹³ Karl Wittfogel, "The Ruling Bureaucracy of Oriental Despotism: A Phenomenon that Paralysed Marx" *Review of Politics*, Vol-15, No. 3, July, 1953, pp. 350-359.

wrote about the importance of irrigation in the Indian economy¹⁴ and discussed them mainly in technological terms.¹⁵

Karl Wittfogel says, "During the last phase of his life—a phase in which he wrote *Das Kapital*, Vol-I, and the drafts of Vol-II and III—Marx continued to stress the importance of large-scale water works, but he discussed them mainly in technological terms. In commenting on hydraulic role of the state, he now referred only to one country, India, whereas previously he had spoken of 'all Asiatic governments'. In commenting on 'despotic states' as supervisors of labour, he now only remarked on their handling 'general affairs that originate from the nature of all commonwealths', whereas he had stressed the fundamental 'economic functions' fulfilled by 'Oriental governments'. And in commenting on the 'leaders of agriculture' in such a typically hydraulic country as Egypt, he was now content to point to the 'rule' of those who were in charge of astronomy: 'the priest caste'." (For the above quotations *vide*. Marx, *Das Kapital*, I, pp. 293, 478 and *Das Kapital*, III, 1:370) Karl Wittfogel, *Ibid.*, pp. 356-357.

¹⁴ Karl Marx, "The Fulfilment of the British Rule in India" New York: *The Daily Tribune*, June 25, 1853. Reprinted in Karl Marx, *Articles on India* (Bombay : Peoples Publishing House, 1943), p. 23 ff. Compare : "But as Marx long ago pointed out, in India, as in other countries of Asia, there existed a distinct type of 'Asiatic' society based on large-scale irrigation works directed by 'the centralizing power of government' with its strong bureaucracy, and which derived its centralizing power partly from these large-scale irrigation works. We cannot develop the point further here. We can only point out that along side of and within this Asiatic type of society, strong feudal elements have existed down to the present."

—Paul Rosas, "Caste and Class in India" *Science and Society*, Spring, 1943, Vol-VII, No. 2, p. 159.

Again F. Engels says, "How comes it that the Orientals did not reach to landed property or feudalism? I think the reason lies principally in the climate, combined with the conditions of the soil, especially the great desert stretches which reach through Sahara right through Arabia, Persia, India and Tartary to the highest Asiatic upland. Artificial irrigation here is the first condition of cultivation, and this is the concern either of the communes, the Provinces or the Central Government."—F. Engels, *Letter to Marx*, June 6, 1853, *vide*. also *Selected Correspondence* (L.W. ed.) pp. 64-68, Letters No. 23 & 24, as quoted by R.P. Dutt, *India To-day* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1940), pp. 94-95.

¹⁵ It might appear from our discussion of the "hydraulic theory" that India is strewn with canals and a visitor would see nothing but canals in India. That is far from the truth. Our point has been to determine the broad outlines of a social structure where people on early migrations began the utilization of artificial water for agricultural production. Such an artificial use of water was definitely an advance over the jungle economy that prevailed in India before the expansion of the Aryan civilization beyond the Indus valley and necessarily conditioned the social structure. In fact, in Bengal and Assam, the problem is not irrigation but erigation or the draining out of surplus rain water. Whether irrigation or erigation, both mean artificial use of water for better production and as such an advance upon

The role of the State in India in the stability of the Indian society is but one factor among many others. The peculiar social stratification of the Indian society, the social weakness of the pre-capitalist Indian bourgeoisie, the character of the pre-capitalist Indian towns, the lack of technological development, the lack of capital accumulation, the character of rural and urban industry and labour and many other such factors may be cited as the causes of the stability of the Indian society. We shall take up here the discussion of some of these factors which would help us particularly to understand the nature of social stratification and social change in the Indian society.

SECTION II

Character of the Pre-British Indian Town

In the European development we find that the town life in the Middle Ages provided the basis on which the first manifestations of capitalism appeared. In our examination of the stability of the Indian society therefore a study of the pre-British Indian town would be useful. So we shall here deal at some length with the character of the pre-British Indian town.

the previous jungle economy. Because irrigation had a derivative importance for the south and east India, for that reason it is of no less importance for those regions.

It seems to the present writer that the "hydraulic theory" of the rise and fall of great kingdoms, with a vast bureaucracy and centralized administration in India, and the impact of such great kingdoms on the relationships between the State, town and village, still remains to be substantiated by more historical and other factual materials. However, it appears to be a very fruitful area for further researches.

We have already put forward our proposition that the social economy in India provided for a sort of stable urbanization, but did not provide for the development of towns on western lines. The European bourgeoisie captured political power in the towns and this led to a social and economic revolution in Europe. But the Indian bourgeoisie failed to capture power in the Indian towns. We shall try to find the causes of such a failure of the Indian bourgeoisie.

It will be useful here to begin with the definition of what we mean by a town, because the definition of such a familiar word has taken many forms and consequently confusions may be created by the use of this term in our discussion. Some have said that a town must have a population, say over 2,000 or 5,000; others have said that it must have walls, or a market, or a University, or must have all of these together, and so on and so forth. These different definitions are due to the different points of particular writers and are used to serve their various purposes. We shall discuss here how the development of towns affects social change and vice versa and therefore our definition of towns will be limited by such a consideration. In this connection the definition given by Henri Pirenne will be important for our purposes:

“An interesting question is whether or not cities existed in the midst of that essentially agricultural civilization into which western Europe had developed in the course of the ninth century. The answer depends on the meaning given to the word ‘city’. If by it is meant a locality of population of which, instead of living by the cultivation of the soil, devotes itself to commercial activity, the answer will have to be ‘No’. The answer will also be in the negative if we understand by ‘city’ a community endowed with legal entity and possessing laws and institutions peculiar to itself. On the other hand if we think of

the city as a centre of administration and as a fortress, it is clear that the Carolingian period knew nearly as many cities as the centuries which followed it must have known. That is another way of saying that the cities which were then to be found were without two of the fundamental attributes of the cities of the Middle Ages and of modern times—a middle class population and communal organization.”¹⁶

We may here accept the above definition of town as given by Henri Pirenne for our purposes. Here, however, we should note that the existence of a middle class is not enough by itself. The most important factor for social change is that in Europe such a middle class and the town municipal institutions were in a position to overcome the feudal control.

It has been pointed out that the British capitalist enterprise in India did not lead to any significant growth of urban population.¹⁷ The pre-British period in India knew almost as many towns, as the succeeding British period must have known. In the wake of the British rule new towns, such as, Madras, Bombay, Calcutta and such others came into existence; but at the same

¹⁶ Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 56.

¹⁷ “The progress of urbanization in India—if there has been any progress at all—has been very slow during the past thirty years, the whole increase being less than one per cent.”—Says the *India Year Book, 1931*, p. 22. D.R. Gadgil is of the opinion that probably the urban population in India was larger at the beginning of the British rule than it was, say, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when India’s first census was taken in 1872. Vide : D.R. Gadgil, *Industrial Evolution of India* (London, Bombay, etc. : Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1924). It was Clive’s opinion that Murshidabad (the capital city of Bengal at the time of the British ascendancy)is as extensive, populous, and rich as the city of London, with this difference that there were individuals in the first possessing infinitely greater property than in the last city.”—Lord Clive in his speech before the British House of Commons, quoted by S.C. Hill, *Indian Records Series, 1756-1757* (London: Published for the Government of India, John Murray, Albermarle Street, London, 1905), p. ccii. Lord Clive was the first Governor of the British possessions at the time of the assumption of sovereignty by the British East India Company in 1757. He was impeached by the British Parliament for his mismanagement of the Company’s affairs.

time the older ones decayed. The essential point in our analysis is not the urban population as such. From the standpoint of social change and social stratification the most significant point is that the British for the first time released forces in India, which "freed" the towns from feudal control. During the pre-British rule a commercial class existed in the towns and municipal institutions were also developed. But unlike the "free towns" of the medieval Europe the commercial class or the town municipal institutions were never free from feudal control. Therefore, we can safely conclude that though urban aggregations existed in pre-British India, towns in the western sense did not exist. About the European development Henri See points out:

"The town life in the Middle Ages furnished the favourable environment in which the first manifestations of capitalism appeared—at least in its purely commercial form; and it is principally in the city republics of Italy and in the Low Countries—two regions especially favoured by economic conditions—that the first signs of capitalism appeared. Why were these two regions singled out as the first favoured fields of capitalism? It was because the maritime commerce with the Orient, following the Crusades, endowed the Italian republics with a great store of capital. It was because the Low Countries served as the principal entrepot in the commerce between the Orient and the North of Europe."¹⁸

To show the slow growth of the urban population we give here the census figures. The percentage of urban population since 1872 (when the first census was taken) runs as follows :—

1872	8.7	1911	9.4
1881	9.3	1921	10.2
1891	9.4	1931	11.1
1901	10.0	1941	12.8

For the census figures *vide* Kingsley Davis, *Population of India and Pakistan* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 127 and also Gadgil, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

¹⁸ Henri See, *Modern Capitalism*, transl. by B. Vanderblue and George F. Doriot (New York: Adelphi, 1928), p. 7.

The feudal princes in Europe at first encouraged town development, because it brought them increased revenue. But the city bourgeoisie soon became powerful enough to shake off feudal jurisdiction over the towns. What is more, they acquired privileged positions which they used to dominate the countryside, to render it into a market and monopolize trade and industry under their control. Under Indian conditions such an independent development of the towns could not take place. Even aside from transforming the countryside into a market the Indian bourgeoisie could not free themselves from feudal control (often vexatious) even within the towns. We have the evidence of a prosperous commercial bourgeoisie in the Indian towns even before the British rule; but in the Indian situation this commercial bourgeoisie did not have the social power to make themselves free from feudal control. The pre-capitalist Indian bourgeoisie had to satisfy themselves with playing a role subordinate to the "courts, noblemen, soldiers, officials, priests and pilgrims," who were in the possession of the towns. It was mainly the wealth of these groups that the Indian bourgeoisie tried to tap. Why was this so?

In western Europe during the medieval period the central State became very weak and the town bourgeoisie in the course of time became powerful enough to challenge the feudal jurisdiction over the towns. We find the emergence of "free towns" first in those areas of western Europe, such as, Italy and the Low Countries where the central state became particularly weak. But in India such a development did not take place. At different periods of Indian history, with the decline of the central authority, the different provincial units became virtually independent. But these provincial units in their turn never lost their grip over the towns. There are several reasons for this. The central fact is that even in the decay and disintegration of the Indian central

State, the social organization emerging from a "water structure" or "hydraulic" economy retained its essential characteristics.¹⁹ Because of this the partially disintegrated feudalism based upon land control and status retained its grip upon the towns. One such period of decay of the Indian social system was going on when the British captured political power in India. This foreign commercial power could capture political power in India because its sources of power were altogether different from those of the Indian bourgeoisie. When the British East India Company was making its territorial conquests in India, social revolution had already taken place in England. The Company got all necessary support from the mother country for its political ventures in India. On the other hand the Indian commercial bourgeoisie could never get political support for its expansion. Therefore we find that it was through the commercial outposts of the British East India Company, such as, Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, and not through the ancient Indian cities, such as, Delhi, Benares, etc., that the capitalist era was ushered in.

Origins of Towns in Europe and India: A Comparison: The cities in India during the pre-British period were merely the off-shoots of the centralized feudal administration. D.R. Gadgil says, "Urban life (during the pre-British period) depended entirely on the nobles and their retinue and the towns were often semi-permanent camps."²⁰ Again Monckton Jones says,

¹⁹ "The individual in large-scale water structure economies is dependent in a concrete sense; he acts collectively and atomistically; he is submerged and but not subjugated. He had to have a sense of social responsibility, for had he lacked it, the basic water structures could have been neither built nor maintained. When, in the development of a derivative capitalism based on taxes, internal disintegration undermined this communal sense of responsibility, production dependent on water structures brought decreasing returns and thus hastened internal decay. Yet in decay, the basic social relations remained communal."—Karl H. Niebyl, "Criteria for the Formulation of an Adequate Approach in Aiding the Development of Underdeveloped Areas", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, August, 1952, p. 366.

“The influence of the foreigners on the industrial life of India is clearly to be seen in the development of town life which they caused. Towns in the east of India which seem to have had any importance before our period (meaning, the British period) derive it from artificial rather than economic causes. The most famous were the ancient capitals or such centres of worship as Benares and Juggernath. The capital of Bengal, tradition says, was established 4,000 years before Akbar's reign. (Akbar's reign, 16th century A.D.)

“Most of the ancient capitals of Bengal proper have become insignificant or fallen into complete ruin, and the same fate has overtaken such capitals or the provinces as Bihar, Purnea, and Tirhut, while river and ocean ports chosen for economic reasons, such as Patna and Dacca inland, Cuttack and Balasor in Orrissa and Chittagong on the coast, increased in importance with the coming of the foreign trader, and have survived all political changes.”²¹

It will be useful here to contrast the development of towns in western Europe and India. From Henri Pirenne we know that during the 9th and 10th centuries long distance trade in Europe was practically at a standstill and so during this period the only settlements which were not purely agricultural were the ecclesiastical, military and administrative centres. These settlements consisted of fortresses, monasteries, episcopal seats, royal residences and the like and therefore had none of the characteristics of true cities, because they were neither industrial nor commercial. He says, “It is therefore a safe conclusion that the period which opened with the Carolingian era knew cities neither in the social sense nor in the legal sense of the

²⁰ Gadgil, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

²¹ Monckton Jones, *Warren Hastings in Bengal*, Oxford Historical and Literary Studies (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1918), p. 23.

word. The towns and the burgs were merely fortified palaces and headquarters of administration. Their inhabitants enjoyed neither special laws nor institutions, of their own, and their manner of life did not distinguish them in any way from the rest of the society.”²² When long distance travel was revived in the 10th and 11th centuries, merchants and artisans settled in those towns and burgs for protection against the pillage of the smaller nobility in the surrounding area. The walled towns and burgs stood at intervals along the rivers and natural routes by which the merchants travelled and therefore they could only offer protection to the wandering merchants. But with the increase in trade, these new comers to the town became more and more numerous and the walled space of the burgs and towns could no longer accommodate them and so they were compelled to settle outside the burg or in the suburb. These places were known as *faubourg* (*farisburgus*) i.e. an outside burg. This new class of people were set apart from the feudal order, because they lived on trade. Henri Pirenne says, “Thus close to ecclesiastical towns and feudal fortresses there sprang up a mercantile agglomeration, whose denizens were devoted to a kind of life which was in complete contrast to that led by the people of the inside town.the primitive bourgeoisie was exclusively composed of men living by trade.”²³

The feudal “core” of such double settlements remained static, but the *faubourg* or the suburb formed by the new comers grew in numbers and strength. At long last a time came when the merchants and the artisans felt strong enough to challenge the control which the feudal element had exercised over them. By force, money and superior ability these people of the suburbs

²² Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities*, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

²³ Henri Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, Transl. by I.E. Clegg, (New York : Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1937), pp. 42-43.

established a new regime which contrasted in all essentials with the old order. The merchants and the artisans thus brought about a distinctive social, economic and legal unit and this unit was the medieval town, and a town in the true sense.

The above is the short summary²⁴ of the origin of the town during the medieval era in Europe, as depicted by the ablest writer on the problem, Henri Pirenne. It is important here to note that like the 9th and 10th century towns of Europe, the pre-British Indian towns had their origin in religious, military and administrative centres. The towns in pre-British India were mainly of three types: (1) places of pilgrimage or sacred places of some kind, (2) the seat of a court or capital of a province, (3) commercial depots.²⁵ D.R. Gadgil points out that of these the first two were by far the most important. Sir Henry Maine, who made a detailed study of the Indian village communities says, "Doubtless most of the Indian towns grew out of the villages, or originally clusters of villages, but the most famous of all grew out of camps. Nearly all the movable capital or the Empire or kingdom was at once swept away to its temporary centre, which became the exclusive seat of skilled manufacture and decorative art. Every man who claimed to belong to the higher class of artificers took his loom or tools and followed in the train of the king."²⁶

²⁴ The above summary is partially taken from A. B. Hibbert, "The Origins of the Medieval Town Patriarchate" *Past and Present*, No. 3. February, 1953.

²⁵ Cf. "Indian cities were not, however, always destroyed by the caprice of the monarch who deserted them to found another capital. Some peculiar *manufacture* had sometimes so firmly established itself as to survive the desertion, and these manufacturing towns sometimes threw out colonies. Capitals, ex-capitals retaining some special art or manufacture, the colonies of such capitals or ex-capitals, villages grown to exceptional greatness, and a certain number of towns which have sprung up around the *temples* built on sites of extraordinary *sacredness*, would go far to complete the list of Indian cities." Henry Maine, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-120.

²⁶ *Loc. cit.*

Sir Henry Maine's remark about the origin of the Indian town is important. The artisans and merchants in the pre-British Indian towns tried to tap the resources of the "consumer class" of the Indian towns and it is on their patronage that the town industries survived. In my own city Dacca (now the capital city of East Pakistan) I have tried to trace the history of some traditional artisan classes such as, the goldsmiths (*swarnakar*), conch-shell bangle-makers (*shankhari*), perfume manufacturers (*gandha-baniks*), and I have found that they originally settled in Pandua, which was the capital of Bengal in the early part of the Muslim rule. In the later part of the Muslim rule, the capital of Bengal shifted to Dacca and these artisan classes migrated *en masse* to the new capital to get the patronage of the court, noblemen and the like for the survival of their industries.

It will be interesting here to note what Max Weber said about the origin of the Chinese cities: "The Chinese character for city means 'fortress', as was also true of the occidental antiquity and the Middle Ages. In Antiquity, the Chinese city was a princely residence and until modern times primarily remained the residence of the viceroy and their dignitaries. In such cities as those of antiquity, and let us say, the Moscow of the period of serfdom it was primarily rent that was spent. This was partly ground rent, partly income from office prebends, and other income that was directly or indirectly politically determined."²⁷

What Max Weber says about the origin of the Chinese city may also be applied to the Indian. In China as well as in India the water structure economy determined the character of the State and the State in its turn determined the character of the towns. As in China so in India names of many of the ancient cities suggest that they were once "fortresses". The term

²⁷ Max Weber, *Religion of China*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

“Pur” or “Puri” which means a capital city is derived from a word which means “fortress”. The Indian scholar B.B. Dutt in connection with town planning in ancient India says,

“These military out-posts favoured the growth of towns about them and the urban tendency was accelerated by the fact that the construction of Indo-Aryan villages proceeded on the same principle as that of a fortress. The names of the towns Cuttack (*Kataka*), Sealkot, Nagarkot, Mangalkot speak of their genesis, in as much as *Kataka* or *Kot* means a fort. Indeed an antique house represents a fort in structure.”²⁸

A recent city-planner of the Government of India, H.V. Lancaster in his survey of the Indian cities found that cities in India used to change site due to the increase or decrease of the military importance of a locality. Speaking of the ancient city plan of Gwalior, he says,

“Since little of the building was of substantial character, and but few of the cities were selected with a view to economic advantages, this (city-planning) was completely easy. Some were based on military demands, in which case it was more often the fort than the town that retained its place. For example the old town of Gwalior stood to the north of the rock fortress, but in the eighth century the Maratha Army was encamped to the south, two miles away, so the town gradually moved to the camp. To-day little remains on the old site but a few temples and tombs.”²⁹

From the above discussion we may conclude that we find some parallels between the ninth and tenth century European and the pre-British Indian towns. That is to say, like Europe,

²⁸ B. B. Dutt, *Town Planning in Ancient India* (Calcutta : Thacker, 1925), pp. 34-35.

²⁹ Sir Patrick Geddes, *Patrick Geddes in India*, ed. by Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, with an “Introduction” by Lewis Mumford (London : L. Humphris, 1947). This quotation is from the “Preface” by H.V. Lancaster, p. 18.

the towns in pre-British India originated and survived for administrative and religious reasons (places of pilgrimage and sacred places of other sorts). But there is also a difference. The towns in pre-British India had their origins in religious and administrative reasons, but they were not merely administrative, military or religious centres. A significant class of merchants and artisans lived in such towns, at least from the beginning of the historic period and unlike Europe this class of merchants and artisans was merely a part of the organic whole of the social organization of the city. That is to say, unlike Europe it was never an independent element in the city organization. It did not originate in the same way as the merchant and artisan class originated in the Europe of the 10th and the 11th centuries. In the organic set-up of the city, the incipient Indian bourgeoisie occupied definitely a lower position and because their status, position, power and prestige emerged from the peculiar social stratification (which we will presently discuss) of an agricultural civilization, they suffered from a social weakness which they could never overcome, even during the periods of their prosperity and the decline of the centralized bureaucratic administration of predominantly irrigation economy of India. For an appreciation of the social weakness of the Indian bourgeoisie, it is necessary for us to examine the problem of the Indian social stratification and the position of the artisans and merchants in the organization of the Indian cities, because the power structure that was built in the towns depended upon its social classes.

SECTION III

Social Stratification as a Bearer of Stability

The primary obstacle to the development of the city in the Orient on western lines was the existence of a peculiar social

economy arising from water control. The social organization based on such a water construction technology was characteristic. The peculiar social stratification growing out of such a social organization was at the root of the social weakness of the Indian bourgeoisie.

The Indian caste system and social stratification arising out of that is as old as the Aryan civilization in India, if not older. It is true the Hindu caste system in course of time changed, and essentially "casteless religions" such as, Buddhism and Islam at the time of the decay of the Hindu society got some converts. But that called for a more effective use of the "ideologies" of Hinduism by the upper classes, such as the Brahmins and the Khshatriyas and the rigidity of the caste system instead of being decreased only increased. It is interesting to note that although the Buddha himself belonged to a Khshatriya princely family, his teachings in the initial stages mostly appealed to the merchants and traders:

"Reading the older Pali Buddhist canon, one is struck by the fact that though the Buddha was from an old and proud, though somewhat decayed *Ksatriya* family, his most ardent lay followers seem to have been merchants, traders, men of wealth—a class that is absolutely silent in Indian history as we have received it from records and inscriptions."³⁰

It is interesting to note that aside from these followers of the Buddha, Buddhism got most of its converts from the despised classes of East Bengal, who for geographical reasons remained beyond the pale of the Aryan civilization. It was from these classes, at a later period, that Islam with its message of

³⁰ D.D. Kosambi, "Caste and Class in India" *Science and Society*, Summer, 1944, Vol. VIII, No. 3, p. 246. The article is a criticism of Paul Rosas's article published in the *Science and Society*, 1943, VII, No. 2, pp. 141-167, under the same title.

equality got its followers. But the protests of "casteless religions" called for more orthodox Brahminical reaction in northern India. "Sir Denzil Ibbetson has propounded the view that the Muhammadan conquest strengthened rather than relaxed the bonds of caste, by depriving the Hindu population of their natural leaders, the Rajputs, (note—The Rajputs were the Scythian invaders of India and were absorbed into the Hindu social system as the ruling class in northern India and mostly belonged to the Khshatriya caste) and throwing them into the hands of the Brahmans, who took their place."³¹

For a true appreciation of the social weakness of the Indian bourgeoisie it is necessary to go back to the origin of the Indian caste system and social stratification. The origin of such an institution is necessarily clouded in obscurity. Nevertheless a functional analysis of the caste system would throw considerable light on the problem. Recently the Indian scholar D.D. Kosambi has given an interesting account of the origin of the caste system, which we will quote at some length:

"We can get a rather faint glimpse of the four caste system in its most remote (pre-Buddhistic) origins, and it is, as far as can be seen, pre-Aryan, probably associated with the ancient civilization of Mohenjodaro and the Indus valley, and with its destruction in or about the second millenium B.C. by the Aryans. It may reasonably be conjectured that conquering warriors swept a civilization which had accurate weights and good cities, but no weapons to speak of. After years, probably centuries of fearfully hungry existence in the forests one clan of the conquered became the priest caste of the conquerors: the Bhar-

³¹ L.S.S. O'Malley, *Indian Caste Customs* (Cambridge, England : University Press, 1932), p.58. D.D. Kosambi says, "This system (i.e. Buddhism) spread not because of its greater attractiveness, but because it gave the necessary impetus to (or was the expression of) the craving for a strong centralized monarchy that would stop the constant, petty warfare and make trade routes safe."—Kosambi, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

gava Brahmins. The conquerors became the *ksatriya* caste, being warriors. The traders are present from old times, and the rest of the population sinks to a regularized slavery, but without large scale trading in human beings as in the west, being the *sudra* caste. The prohibition against a *sudra* learning therefore is a precautionary measure against helots. This system crude as it may sound, was still a powerful advance over what existed before: helpless cities and almost savage barbarians who sacked them. It is this system that enabled other regions to be opened up, that allowed a more vigorous if less decorative civilization to advance into the interior of India. Its flexibility, its post-Buddhistic development into a method for maintaining the status of any rule that made nominal concessions to Hinduism, enabled it to survive great changes."³²

As already said, we shall deal here with the problem from the functional aspect. On their migration into India (approximately 1,500 B.C.) the Aryans first settled around the Indus valley. In this region of India no large scale agriculture was possible without irrigation. The necessity for irrigation created the need for agricultural officials for central planning, central supervision, central maintenance and central protection of the water constructions. Such a centralized administration created along with it two distinct social classes as social controllers—the Brahmins, the legislative branch, with their "ideologies"; and the Khshatriyas, the executive branch with the authority and power to enforce law and order within the community. In the course of the evolution of the Hindu social system, the original function performed by the Brahmins and Khshatriyas has been lost sight of. But it should be remembered that originally they were no more than officers appointed by the community for the maintenance of the water

³² Kosambi, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-248.

constructions of an agricultural economy. Any scientific examination of the earliest scriptures of the Hindu religion would justify our claim to term them so. The agricultural and social organization techniques developed by the Aryans in the Indus valley were later utilized for developing the latent water resources of India, especially in the east and the south.

“The consequent conquest of tropical nature and of aboriginal tribes fanned out slowly from this centre in a southward and eastward direction, the kshatriyas carrying on the conquest with the sword while the Brahman spread their thinning veneer of Hindu religion over this vast region. This process was in many ways similar to the fanning out of Chinese economy and culture from its origin in the Wei and Hwang-ho regions over the whole of China.”³³

Another fact to be remembered is that in the social development of India the upper castes—Brahmins and Khshatriyas—became functionally divorced from production. They thus became to all intents and purposes a parasitic class uninterested in improvements in the methods of production. This made the upper classes all the more rigid in their role as caste leaders. Moreover, it is to be remembered that irrigation techniques in the rest of India, except for the Indus valley had derivative importance. Should we say here that due to this derivative nature of irrigation for the rest of India, the Brahmins and the Khshatriyas became divorced from production and their emphasis on the “ideologies” and on the hierarchical nature of society increased? Because it is only in this way that the developed techniques of water control could be introduced for the rest of India.

The roots of the social weakness of the traditional Indian bourgeoisie are to be sought in this agricultural set up. The merchant class necessarily occupied only a secondary importance

³³ Paul Rosas, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-165.

in the powerful agricultural civilization developed in India. The castes were mere social classes at the beginning of this civilization and only later on did they become rigid castes. Because the social classes in their course of development became extremely rigid, the merchant and the trader class could never overcome its original lower social status inherited from the agricultural civilization. Emile Senart,³⁴ who made a detailed

³⁴ Emile Senart, *Caste in India*, Transl. by E. Denison Ross (London : Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1930), pp. 132-133. Cf. "It is to the great credit of Emile Senart that he pointed out as early as 1894 that the Brahmans (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaisyas (commoners) and the Sudras (untouchables), not only to-day but already in Vedic times, are not castes at all but classes, and that each of these classes to-day embraces a large number of individual castes whose positions in the hierarchy depends upon social function, tradition, occupation and so on. Thus the Brahmans are not one caste but a class, or rather an estate, comprising hundreds of castes, and this likewise is true for the Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras."—Paul Rosas, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-157.

I shall quote here at some length from Karl H. Niebyl's recent masterly analysis of the origin of the caste system in the agricultural economy of India to show the cause of the social weakness of the Indian bourgeoisie. "..... agriculture in the Indus valley was and is dependent upon an artificial water supply, and it was this fact that is responsible for the formation of an oriental form of society in India. Irrigation necessitated social integration in the Indus valley and the techniques developed—agricultural as well as social—made it possible later on to utilize other latent water resources of India and thus extend Indus valley civilization over the larger part of India. The centralized irrigation in the Indus valley created a civil bureaucracy—the Brahmin class—which similar to the one in Mesopotamia, also developed a 'temple', though less intensely so.

"The relation between the Brahmins and the princes—the military—took a form in which the Brahmins functioned as the basic legislative branch in the political organism of India while the Rajas constituted something like an independent group of executives. In the similar way the *Rig Veda* constituted a collection of the general social and moral directions containing important relics from the time of primitive social organizations. For example, ancestor worship serves as the foundation for the power exercised by the Brahmin. The *Yahura Veda* amounts to a collection of prescriptions for the enforcement of the general rules and codes of the *Rig Veda*.It is on the basis of the *Yahura Veda* that the Rajas perform their executive power while the Brahmins are the guardians of the basic law.

"As traders in India are not commission agents of all powerful groups, they were somewhat more independent than for instance those in Mesopotamia or Egypt. But even so they constitute a definitely lower class of people than either the Brahmin or Rajas. They usually are the former Dravidians." Karl H. Niebyl, *Background of the Society Today*, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-148.

study of the Indian castes, is of the opinion that in the Vedic times they were not castes at all but classes whose position in the hierarchy depended, upon social function, tradition, occupation and so on. So the Brahmin, Khshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra developed somewhat like the estates of the Middle Ages of Europe but in the Indian situation became much more rigid than in Europe.

Segregation of Castes in the Town

The social stratification of the town did not substantially differ from that of the village. The different castes and communities were segregated into different quarters which were mutually exclusive. The town municipal institutions were early developed, but no unified town community (i.e. no unified community for achieving common political objectives) could be developed. Max Weber points out that this stood in the way of the development of towns in the western sense. He says, "In India the castes were not in a position to form ritualistic communities and hence a city, because they were ceremonially alien to each other."³⁵ At the time of the British ascendancy, we find the following picture of the caste organization in the rising city of Calcutta: "In the town of Calcutta.....a regular court, known as Caste Cutcherry (court), was for some time maintained by the British for the settlement of caste questions. The British Governor was nominally its president: the *de facto* president was his Indian Banyan or agent, whom he deputed to act for him. Warren Hastings stated, 'I myself am President, but I conceive myself merely a name to authenticate the acts of others'."³⁶

³⁵ Max Weber, *General Economic History*, Loc. cit.

³⁶ L.S.S. O'Malley, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

Thus we find that the British inherited the social organization of the city from India's past. But it was soon felt that it was not in conformity with the type of rule that the British had introduced into India and therefore the Governor ceased to be even the titular head of the Caste Cutcherry (court). A modern architect of the Government of India found in his survey of the Indian cities that even now there is a tendency for each caste to live segregated, "The segregation of caste groups and the tendency of families to remain together through several generations, are two important factors conducive to this state of affairs. A trade caste occupying a certain quarter is hemmed in by others, and has no other course open to it than to build intensively."³⁷ In a previous chapter we have already given the detailed account of the segregation of different castes and communities as depicted by the poet Mukundaram. Monckton Jones writing of *Ain-i-Akbari* (author Abul Fazal, a courtier of Emperor Akbar, sixteenth century) says,

"Castes or gilds of artificers existed, for in Akbar's reign the Kotwal or chief officer of police in a town was charged to see that each had a master and broker to arrange their sales. He was further to assign special quarters to 'butchers, hunters of beasts, washers of dead, sweepers and such stoney hearted, gloomy dispositioned creatures'."³⁸

In early Hindu literature too we find the same description of the segregation of castes and communities. Dr. Acharyya in his translation of the *Manasara Silpasastra* (an ancient architectural treatise) states, "The people of the same caste or profession are generally housed in the same quarter..... The best quarters are generally reserved for the Brahmins and the artist classes.The habitations of the Chandals (i.e. untouch-

³⁷ Patrick Geddes, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

³⁸ Monckton Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

ables) as well as the places of cremation are located outside the village wall (in the northwest in particular)."³⁹

Giving an excellent description of the city organization during the Muslim period of India, K.M. Ashraf says, "The city was divided into separate quarters for various social groups. In keeping with social ideas of the day some classes of people, for instance, the scavengers, the leather-dressers and the very poorest beggars and wretches, were segregated from the rest of the population and were made to live on the outskirts of the towns. The rest of the population divided itself into religious, racial and even occupational groups. For instance Muslims, Hindus had separate quarters; nobles and common people lived in distinct parts of the city; among the common people various trades and castes lived in their quarters. All these quarters were designed to be as complete and as self-sufficient as possible; in fact, some of them developed all the features of big towns and were provided with all the social amenities of a city on a smaller scale."⁴⁰

³⁹ B.B. Dutt, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

⁴⁰ Kunwar Muhammad Ashraf, "Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan", *Asiatic Society of Bengal Journal—Letters*, Vol-I, 1935, pp. 267-268.

D.R. Gadgil has tried to draw parallels between the development of towns in western Europe and India in his study of the origin of the city of Poona. He says, "Under the Mohammedans the town (Poona—in Bombay Presidency, India) was fortified. Barya Arab, the Thanedar at Poona, is traditionally held responsible for the construction of the fortifications. Under him Poona was chiefly a garrison town. The Gazetteer notes that the army and its followers with few Mohammedan villagers were alone allowed to live within the wall. This was the first stage in the development of Poona." Then he says, "Professor Stephenson giving Pirenne's theory of the origin of medieval towns in Europe writes, 'No matter what the sight or whose soil, the nucleus of the medieval town was a settlement of traders, generally stockaded quarter outside older fortifications'." These efforts at drawing parallels between the Medieval European town and the Indian, in my opinion, are incorrect. From the above description it is clear that the army and some Muhammedan cultivators lived within the walls, while both Brahmins and traders lived outside the walls. This was a segregation on the basis of religious communities. The period during which the city was founded was

The above description of the social stratification of the cities during the Muslim period may be compared with the following comment on the social stratification made by B.B. Dutt: "This Hindu sociology (i.e. Varnasram-Adharma) dividing the whole Hindu community into four principal castes which ultimately disintegrated into many more subcastes, stamped the Aryan town or village planning with indelible marks of its own. For we find, in town or village, different building plots or wards were assigned to different castes and subcastes and the Silpa Sastras (i.e. the science of architecture) are very much particular in their distribution. In this stratification also, communalism asserted itself, for every building, block, or ward of town was planned in village planning and consequently such communal centre as the council tree and the square were necessarily provided for in the wards or the building plots."⁴¹

The Role of The Caste Guilds

It may therefore be amply demonstrated from different historical evidences and also by an analysis of the present composition of the population of the relatively older Indian cities that the different castes and communities living in the Indian city could never produce a homogeneous community (i.e. a city community standing for political and social

the era of Muslim rule and the army therefore must have consisted mainly of Muslim elements and therefore the city inside the wall was given to the Muslim community. It should be remembered that the origin of the Indian bourgeoisie was altogether different from that of its counterpart in Europe and a great mistake would be made if we seek parallels here.

The above quotations are from D.R. Gadgil, *Poona—A Sociometric Survey* (Poona, India : Gokhale Institute of Economics and Political Science, 1951?) pp. 11-13.

⁴¹ B.B. Dutt, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

rights of its own). The power structure and administration of the city therefore clearly reflected the feudal hierarchical order, where the trading classes occupied a lower and often a despised position. The pre-capitalist Indian bourgeoisie was composed of this trading class and therefore could never overcome the social weakness imposed upon it. Individual merchants frequently rose to positions of power and influence, but in general the merchants never enjoyed complete immunity from vexatious interference from the feudal chiefs. The merchants and handicraftsmen, that is the bourgeoisie as a class organized in the guilds, never attained the supremacy which their counterparts in Europe won for themselves when they seized power in the towns. This was, as we have already said, because of the social weakness imposed upon the bourgeoisie by the peculiar Indian social stratification and also because the Indian town was nearly always an outpost of the territorial State, and was as such governed by prefects or boards appointed from the centre. The city, thus being the base of imperial administration, actually enjoyed much less autonomy than the country. The political and social weakness of the Indian bourgeoisie was therefore due to the absence in Indian history of anything comparable to the town economy of the European Middle Ages.⁴² The guilds of the Middle Ages in Europe which later stood in the way of economic development and technical inventions were at the earlier stages the spearhead of attack against the older order of Europe. Through these guilds the European merchant

⁴² Cf. "During this period (14th. and 15th. centuries of Europe) the whole of the commercial and industrial life of the time was concentrated in, and indeed confined to, the towns; was controlled, assisted and limited by municipal regulation.The policy of self-interest pursued by the towns was directed not only against burgesses of other towns, but also in relation to the inhabitants of the surrounding agricultural areas.Every town expected to obtain for its own consumption the surplus food grown in the country around, and sought to prevent the rustics from engaging in any industry which could compete with its own manufacture."—*Palgrave's Dictionary of Political Economy*, III, p. 552.

and industrial classes not only secured protection for themselves, but the right and power to enforce measures to conform to their interests.

In India, too, there were guilds—craft as well as merchant guilds. Their origin can be traced back to the sixth century B.C. The organization and activities of these guilds were in many respects similar to those of the European guilds. Customary as well as public law recognized their status and legal authorities in the land upheld the same. But all the evidences that we have point to the conclusion that, far from achieving freedom of effective action, the guilds were at best defensive organizations. Their jurisdictions extended only to their members; and even here the ultimate responsibility for ending dissensions and enforcing guild regulations lay with king or his prefect or a board of adjudicators appointed by him. It is important here to remember that such an organization of the merchant and craft guilds, unlike Europe was mostly on the basis of the caste. In most of the cases they could be called caste guilds. It is true that sometimes a particular trade was pursued by different castes and its guild usually included all such men within the trade without reference to the caste. But in such a case the power structure of the guild also clearly reflected the caste hierarchy. Sir George Birdwood says, "The trade guilds of great polytechnical cities of India are not, however, always exactly coincident with the sectarian or ethnical caste of a particular class of artisans. Sometimes the same trade is pursued by men of different castes, and its guild generally includes every member of the trade it represents without strict reference to the castes. The government of the guilds or unions is analogous to that of the village communities and castes, that is, by hereditary officers. Each separate guild is managed by a court of aldermen or *mahajans* (literally 'great gentlemen'). Nominally it is composed

of all the free men of the caste, but a special position is allowed to the Seths, lords or chiefs of the guild, who are ordinarily two in number, and hold their positions by hereditary right. The only other office-bearer is the salaried clerk or *gumasta*.”⁴³

Each trade or caste guild within the city was a “little” city within the bigger city, having their own by-laws, courts of adjudication and other paraphernalia of a little city corporation. In each village of India there was at least one principal artisan to supply the needs of the villagers. But such artisans, as Sir George Birdwood says, were “strangers within the gate”⁴⁴ and remained in the village on a tacitly understood contract with the agricultural population of the village. When the villages expanded into towns, the village artisans came to be organized in caste guilds, to which they already belonged even when they were members of the territorial village community. (The village communities were territorial, but the caste and trade guilds cut across territorial ties) :

“As each village, however small, employed at least one of the principal mechanics, so, when it became enlarged to the capacity of a town, a certain number of each craft formed a corporate body, like that of the agriculturist. These bodies then choose their chief or alderman in the same way the landowners elected their mayor, and through him the government imposed taxes on the wards and carried on its intercourse. In cities there are aldermen of wards and corporations, the latter having their own by-laws and courts of adjudication for their own affairs, independent of all other courts.”⁴⁵

⁴³ George Birdwood, *The Industrial Arts of India* (London: Chapman and Hall, Preface written, 1880), p. 136.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁴⁵ J. Briggs, *The Present Land Tax in India*, as quoted by Gorham D. Sanderson, *India and British Imperialism* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1951), p. 44.

The above is the account of the city organization of India given by J. Briggs at the beginning of the British rule. The important thing for us to note is that although the different occupational guilds enjoyed autonomy in the management of the affairs of the guilds, and since the castes and subcastes were segregated and since the guilds clearly reflected the caste segregation, the members of the guilds never thought in terms of the autonomy of the city, a phenomenon which we find in medieval Europe. The individual was absolutely and unconditionally dependent upon the merchant and craft guilds and therefore his allegiance was first and foremost to the guild. In the west too we find the development of merchant and craft guilds, but in the west the authority exercised by the guilds was never so absolute as in China or India.

“The paucity of imperial administration actually meant that the Chinese in town and country ‘governed themselves’. Like the sibs in rural areas, the occupational associations in the city held sovereign sway over the way of life of their members. This they did at the side of sib as well as over those who did not belong to any sib or at least not any old and strong one. With the exception of Indian castes and their different forms, nowhere is the individual so unconditionally dependent upon craft and merchant guilds (which were not differentiated terminologically) as in China.”⁴⁶

In the development of the city in the west, we find that the city population stood in a body for citizenship rights against the feudal authority. By such demands for city self-government, the city population exacted a royal charter recognizing the right of the city to legislate for itself. But in India the city

⁴⁶ Max Weber, *Religion of China*, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

population divided into mutually exclusive caste communities could never produce a united resistance against the imperial rule over the city. As is well known the guild in the European city were always on a trade and craft basis and obviously did not represent all the interest groups within the city. But in the European cities there was also a life called the city life and city solidarity, which was no less important than the guild life and guild solidarity. In the Indian situation such a sense of city solidarity did not develop and we are anxious to point out here that it was due to the peculiar nature of the Indian social stratification. Max Weber well explained this point in his *Religion of China* which may be compared with the Indian development:

“In contrast to the Occident, the cities in China and throughout the Orient lacked political autonomy. The oriental city was not a ‘polis’, in the sense of Antiquity, and it knew nothing of the ‘city law’ of Middle Ages, for it was not a ‘commune’ with political privileges of its own. Nor was there a citizenry in the sense of self-equipped military estate such as existed in occidental Antiquity. No military oath-bound communities like the *Compagna Communis* of Genoa or other Coniurationes ever sprang up to fight or ally themselves with the feudal lords of the city in order to attain autonomy. No forces emerged like the consuls, councils, or political associations of merchant and craft guilds such as *Mercanza* which were based upon the military independence of the city district. Revolts of the urban populace which forced the officials to flee into the citadels had always been the order of the day. But they always aimed at removing a concrete official or a concrete decree, especially a new tax, never at gaining a charter which might, at least in the relative way, guarantees the freedom of the city. This was hardly possible along occidental lines because the fetters of the sib were never shattered.....

“In sharp contrast with the Occident, but in harmony with Indian conditions, the city as an imperial fortress actually had fewer formal guarantees of self-government than the village. Legally the city consisted of “village districts” under particular *tipao* (elders).....”⁴⁷

The towns in the west ultimately developed commune-like city organization. But in the Indian conditions the different castes and communities remained segregated and such a development never happened. The *seth* or *shresthi* (elders) of the guilds at different periods of Indian history became quite powerful and ranked equally with the warrior nobility of their time. In the areas, and, during the period when these conditions prevailed, the power of the caste was undeveloped and partly hindered by the growth of casteless religions. But later these areas were oriented towards caste rule. With the increase in the importance of the Brahmins the importance of the caste increased, and with it also increased the power of the princes. The prince could play off one caste against another, which he often did, and as long as the Brahmin stood by the prince's side, he had nothing to fear from the guilds. The monopoly rule of the caste not only increased the power of the Brahmins and the princes, it also broke the power of the guilds and the commercial and artisan classes organized in the guilds could not overcome their social weakness.

Again, in the west we find that when the bourgeoisie captured political power in the towns, it did not present any threat to the stability of rural production. This was because in the west the towns did not play the same important role in rural production as they did in India—as we have already observed, in the 9th and 10th centuries European towns were mere ecclesiastical, military

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-15.

and administrative centres. The pre-British Indian towns were also so, but because of irrigation technology they played a more vital role in rural production than their counterparts played in Europe. In Indian conditions therefore, such a capture of power in the towns by the bourgeoisie would have presented a threat to rural production. So the State whose fortunes were bound up with the land never relaxed its hold on the towns which were the centres of its action. This is the way the State kept the incipient bourgeoisie in check.

That is why commerce and guilds and towns did not bring about a division of labour between town and country, the town concentrating upon trade and the country upon agriculture. That is also the reason why the character of the pre-British Indian towns was determined by administrative and military factors. The character of the State in India was determined by the Indian social economy and the State in its turn stood in the way of the emergence of a free commercial community. The feudal nobility, however tyrannical and powerful they might have been in their domains, were mere revenue farmers and tax-collectors, with the functions of the maintenance of the water structures and of the law and order necessary to such an economy. The feudal nobility was part of a vast network of bureaucracy and this bureaucracy's source of power was the central government which used the towns as its centres of action.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Compare the following account given by Bernier in the seventeenth century:

"The persons thus put in possession of the land, whether as *timaroits*, governors, contractors, have an authority almost absolute over the peasantry, and nearly as much over the artisans and merchants of the towns and villages within their district and nothing can be imagined more cruel and oppressive than the manner in which it is exercised.

"This debasing state of slavery (*speaking of the above oppression*) obstructs the progress of trade and influences the manners and modes of life of every individual. There can be little encouragement to engage in commercial pursuits, when the success with which they may be attended, instead of adding

The Role of Self-Sufficient Village Communities

In a previous chapter we have already examined the self-sufficient nature of the Indian village communities which was responsible for the stability of Indian society. European manorial system was a much weaker and much less stable organization than the Indian village community. There was no room for either serfdom or baronial exploitation in the Indian village communities and therefore the Indian village was more firmly entrenched in the Indian social structure. During the decline of feudalism in Europe we find that urban trade and industry needed labour and the feudal lords could not enforce their juristic rights to require serfs to return to the manor. Devastation of the countryside, long wars and plagues, decrease of rural population (due to war and migration to the towns) and inflation (due to the influx of gold and silver, both from the crusades and trade profits) greatly shook the economic stability of the feudal nobility in Europe. Growth of towns held out new prospects to them. Such an economic development did not take place in India. Based on an unalterable division of labour and a social stratification peculiar to itself, the Indian village communities could resist all outside attacks. The social

to the enjoyments of life, provokes the cupidity of a neighbouring tyrant possessing both power and inclination to deprive any man of the fruits of his industry."—F. Bernier, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

About the vexatious interference by the feudal nobility in India in commercial pursuits, Radhakamal Mukherjee says, ".....the merchant was also subject to occasional confiscation of wealth while the practice of escheating was also prevalent. It is mentioned that Mir Jumla once demanded Rs. 50,000 from the merchants of Dacca. On refusal they were threatened with death by being trampled by elephants and compromised for Rs. 25,000, while the bankers of the city appeased his wrath by paying Rs. 300,000 (three hundred thousand) without much further ado. Occasionally, however, the mercantile community could protest successfully against the exactions of a Governor or high administrative officer by hartal or suspension of business."—Radhakamal Mukherjee, *The Economic History of India* (London, etc.: Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., n.d.), p. 67.

organization of the village community gave economic security to its members, and because of that the village organization remained stable and unchanged.

The Lack of Technological Development

The Indian urban artisans catering to the demands of the opulent aristocracy early attained high artistic talents and their artistic products were in demand not only in India but in the most expensive courts in different parts of the world.⁴⁹ The question has been asked—Why could not Indian industries with such high artistic attainments achieve technological development?

Jawaharlal Nehru in his recent book *The Discovery of India* asks this very question. He points out that Emperor Akbar (sixteenth century A.D.) was full of curiosity, ever seeking to find out about things both spiritual and temporal and was interested in mechanical advances as well as in science. Portuguese Jesuits in the court of the Emperor tell us, "He was interes-

⁴⁹ Cf. "The Indian remembers (as many of us do not) that when Europeans first came to India, which was the beginning of the sixteenth century, his country was well able to bear comparison with the civilizations of the west. India which is now a country of poor people, was then fabulously wealthy; it was the almost mythical riches of the Indies which led so many European adventurers to lose their lives in attempts to discover a sea route to this source of plenty. Indian craftsmanship at that time was among the finest in the world; handworks in cotton, silk, carpets, silver and ivory had evolved a technical excellence unknown in the west; their textiles were of a richness and beauty which has never been surpassed, and were the envy of Europe when the first merchants carried them home. Indian products were indeed, so rich and various that one of the chief problems of the early European traders was to find western goods which the Indian considered acceptable as exchange."—Lord Huntingdon, *Commonsense About India*, p. 14. For the artistic and technical skills attained by the Indian artisan see also, Birdwood, *op. cit.*, pp. 136 ff.

ted in and curious to learn about many things, and possessed an intimate knowledge not only of military and political matters, but many of the mechanical arts." "And yet", Jawaharlal Nehru says, "it is very curious how his curiosity stopped at a point and did not lead him to explore certain obvious avenues which lay open before." He further says,

"This lack of mechanical bent is remarkable, especially as there were very fine craftsmen and artisans in India.

"It is not in India alone that this paralysis of creative energy and inventive faculty is visible during this period. The whole of western and central Asia suffered from it even more.....

"Akbar's century was the sixteenth, which saw in Europe the birth of the dynamo, a revolutionary advance in the life of humanity. With that discovery Europe forged ahead, slowly at first but with an ever-increasing momentum, till in the nineteenth century it shot forward and built a new world. While Europe was taking advantage of and exploiting the powers of nature, Asia, static and dormant, still carried on in the old traditional way relying on man's toil and labor.

"Why was this so?....."⁵⁰

Such questions regarding the stability of the Indian social order have been asked. It should be noted that although individuals like the Emperor Akbar might have been interested in technical improvements, the development of technological science does not depend upon the interest of an Emperor. It always depends upon the nature of the industrial organization of a country as well as the nature of the utilization of the labour in those industries. For the development of technological science we must first of all have industries which can absorb surplus population in full work and also scope for capital accumu-

⁵⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New York: John Day Company, 1945), pp. 257-261.

lation. The workers of neither the pre-British urban nor rural industries were full time. They were mostly seasonal and often combined agricultural work with their "wage work" and had therefore hardly any opportunity for specialization. Again, the necessity of water regulation in an essentially hydraulic economy prevented the use of water mills in India, which is the most elementary form of all machinery, because it would have greatly disturbed the irrigation systems, upon which the country's economy depended. The scope for capital accumulation is also important for technological development. We could look for the saving group among the upper classes in India. But we have earlier observed that the upper classes became structurally divorced from production. They were therefore not concerned with the economic and technical questions of increasing production. They were satisfied if they could squeeze the maximum out of the peasant. Unlike their European counterparts who used enclosures, forced labour, application of better manures, ect., the Indian upper classes were not concerned with the questions of changing the method of cultivation. Another group who could accumulate capital was the merchant class. But so long as the feudal power remained strong they were at the complete mercy of the feudal lords and if they ever accumulated much wealth, they always tried to hide it by hoarding it instead of employing it for further production.

On the other hand, we find, the village artisans, as organized in village communities, lost all incentives for improving their technical skill.⁵¹ The villages offered them economic security and the peasants were bound by custom to buy practically all their agricultural implements from the village artisans. This

⁵¹ *Vide* Gadgil, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

Again of the Chhattisgarh carpenter, we read, "The implements used are so rough that the cultivators generally prepare their own or if pushed make for the nearest town."—Report of the *C.P. Census, 1891*. Loc. cit.

barred all external competitions and was responsible for the lack of the increase in the technical skill of the village artisans. On the other hand, the urban industry was entirely dependent upon the patronage of the aristocracy and catered to their luxury demands. Such patrons of urban industries were quite uninterested in the technical skill of the urban artisan—they were satisfied if the artisan produced articles demanded by their artistic taste. The urban artisan therefore attained high artistic talents. The artisan lost his eyesight, he spent his whole life, attention and energy for producing things of high artistic design. But that did not lead to the increase in his technical skill a bit. As has been well pointed out : “The weakness of Indian technology was not that it was primitive, but that it was unprogressive, it was bound up with a social order antagonistic to its development. And the political expression of its stagnancy was a State apparatus that continued to be dominated by a class with a vested interest in land.”⁵²

It should not be concluded from what we have said above that the Indian social order was absolutely static and that no social change was taking place. What we wish to emphasize here is that social change was undoubtedly taking place both in India and Europe, but the nature of social change in Europe and India was different in some fundamental respects. In India active agencies of social change were the State and commerce. It will not be possible for us to go into a discussion of how these agencies helped or retarded social change in the different periods of Indian history. It would suffice here to say that the State at different periods increased its activity to such an extent that modern writers have used it of such terms as, “Cameralism” and “State Socialism”. On the other hand, commerce expanded to such an extent that Indian made luxury

⁵² Shelvankar, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

products were in demand in various expensive courts of the world. But with all such elements of vitality, Indian society failed to transform itself to a capitalist order. Our purpose in the previous pages has been to enumerate some of the causes of such a failure. It was therefore destined that a foreign commercial power should perform that task of transformation of Indian society into a capitalist society.

CHAPTER IV

TRANSFORMATION OF THE MUGHAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE

SECTION I

Aspects of Dynamism in the Muslim Rule

Joan Beauchamp describes the process of the disintegration of the Mughal Empire. Beauchamp says that in spite of the growth of a powerful native commercial class, India was over-run by a foreign commercial power and the native commercial community could not replace the Indian feudal power as had happened in the case of the European nations. Joan Beauchamp says,

“The state feudalism introduced by the Mohammedan emperors interfered with the native feudal society, and the power of the Mughals was undermined by the growth of native feudal monarchies, which were more virile because of their contact with the people. In the earlier part of the eighteenth century, when the Mughal Empire was disintegrating, a new middle class was beginning to arise. Although the village retained its position as the productive unit, urban trading centres had arisen as a result of the exchange and export, rather than for local use. The new states which sprang up amidst the ruins of the Mughal Empire were largely controlled financially by the trading class, although their political structure remained feudal. But India was destined to undergo a new invasion, from a country which had already reached a more advanced stage of economic development, before these new economic forces had been able to weld her into unity and while she was in a

stage of transition and disintegration which left her an easy prey to foreign conquest.”¹

At the beginning of our discussion we have pointed out that although the Muslim rule for the first time introduced money economy “on a large scale” hitherto unknown in the Indian system, it did not change the fundamental basis of the method of production, and therefore, it could not change the ancient social stratification in any vital sense. We have argued that it was destined to be done by the British, because they were for the first time successful in the introduction of forces in the economic arena which differed in some fundamental respects from the traditional method of production of the country. This led to the conclusion by some writers that dynastic changes and political upheavals did not affect the social life and therefore Indian history is merely the history of kings and emperors. That is to say, it is not at all the history of society at large and of social interactions—because according to this view, dynastic changes did not mean any change in the social structure. Such a view about the Indian development has been proposed by no less an authority than Karl Marx himself. The contrary view regarding Indian history has been proposed by the eminent Indian M. N. Roy in his book *India in Transition*. But the late M.N. Roy did not specifically challenge the Marxian view in this respect, though he was the first to appreciate that even before British rule Indian society had undergone a vital change in the economic arena, which created possibilities for its transformation into a capitalist society. M.N. Roy also did not specifically speak of the dynamic nature of the Muslim rule. Therefore the credit for such a study goes to Prof. W. C. Smith who has recently pointed out that an amendment of the

¹ Joan Beauchamp, *British Imperialism in India* (London: M. Lawrence Limited, 1935), p. 16.

Marxian view has become a necessity. He says, "Thus we see that an amendment is necessary in Karl Marx's otherwise brilliant analysis of Indian social history. More than ninety years ago, Marx wrote: 'All the civil wars, invasions, revolutions, conquests, famines, strangely complex, rapid and destructive as the successive action in Hindustan may appear, did not go deeper than its surface.' (In the *New York Daily Tribune*, June 25, 1853)—meaning that the 'kings, courts, and conquests' did not, as Vincent Smith also imagined, alter the fundamental village life of India. The curious point is not that an amendment should now be necessary, but that virtually no progress has been made during the century since this writer set the study of Indian history on the right track."

He further says, "Our thesis is that the Mughal conquest did touch the village economy of India and began to revolutionize it. However, it is not our purpose here to examine that revolution from the point of the villagers.Our concern here is with the merchants. It is hardly mere idle speculation to suggest that the new economy implies a new prosperity, almost a new world order for the commercial middle class."

"Briefly, the hypothesis is this: that the rise and florescence of the Mughal Empire as a political, economic and cultural process was connected with the florescence from the early sixteenth century of a prosperous merchant middle class; and that the decadence of that middle class in the seventeenth century left the empire to be based only on the landed upper class, whereupon that empire reverted to a purely feudal organization, which became disorganized, and presently collapsed.

"The rise of the Mughal Empire, we are suggesting, was dependent on the rise of the middle class; and the future certainly lay with that class, not with nobility. The normal process would have been that before long the merchants would have

seized political power for themselves, and ousted the upper class nobles. And that is actually what did eventually happen. Only, by then trade had passed into European hands; and the middle class which seized power was a foreign middle class, not an Indian one."²

This view regarding the evolution of the Indian system seems to be correct. Even before the British rule various factors conspired to break the exclusive economy of the Indian village organization and the social structure in general. The change in the Mughal social structure was caused not only primarily

² Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Mughal Empire and the Middle Class—A Hypothesis", *Islamic Culture* (Hyderabad, Deccan, India), Vol—XVIII, No. 4, October, 1944, p.35. It will be relevant here for our purposes to have a glimpse of the flourishing trade between India and Europe during the seventeenth century that is after the founding of the British East India Company.—"In 1615 Sir Dudley Digges published his famous pamphlet entitled *A Defence of Commerce*, showing that the re-export of Indian goods from England to the Continent had yearly exceeded the value of the bullion exported from England to India; but that the English had, from the time of the establishment of the East India Company saved £70,000 a year in price of pepper and other spices; and had further benefitted from the commerce with India by the increase of the customs revenue and the building of great ships, and the employment of large numbers of Englishmen in the Company's business. In the previous year, 1614, the Company had exported to India £14,000 worth of English woolen goods, 'bays kersies, and broadcloths', and £10,000 worth of iron, lead, and foreign merchandise, against £12,000 sent out in bullion; while the shipping employed by them that year had cost £34,000, and the provisioning of them and other contingent charges had amounted to £30,000 more."—Sir George Birdwood, *Report on the Old Records of the India Office* (London & Calcutta: W.H. Allen & Co., 1891), p. 210; Cf. also "In 1621 Sir Thomas Mun, Deputy Governour (sic) of the Company, published his *Discourse of Trade from England to the East Indies*. In this he showed that the annual consumption in Europe of the following articles from southern Asia then was:—

	lbs.
Pepper	6,000,000
Cloves	450,000
Nutmegs	400,000
Indigo	350,000
Mace	150,000
Raw silk (Persia)	1,000,000

vide. Ibid., p. 213.

by the inherent nature of the Muslim rule (with its money economy), but also by the general international trends. Commerce began to be expanded to include larger populations, instead of merely a tiny ruling class and the towns of the pre-British period. The agricultural produce which hitherto was locally consumed (important cash crops, such as jute, indigo, etc.) now entered the international market. The barter economy was gradually being replaced by a money economy and we find that the Mughal treasury was minting more and more cash money as the demand for it increased more and more. The increase in international trade in the later period of the Muslim rule led to the huge influx of gold and silver, which must have led to brisk activity in business and production. Besides these, Muslim rule also introduced some amount of dynamism into the traditional social structure of India. The Muslim rule because of its very nature introduced individualistic and capitalistic ideas of property, which mildly affected the village constitution and the notions of the ownership of property. It also introduced farming methods (by grant of *jaigirdaries*, for example) of cultivation hitherto unknown in Indian villages. Probably due to this, new schools of Hindu Law of inheritance sprang up during the Muslim rule emphasizing the individualistic notions of property and the necessity of the breakup of the joint family holdings.

“Both in Bengal and Bihar, from the days of Muhammadan administration, there has been a superimposition by the State of individualistic ideas of property. There has been remarkable development of economic and juristic institutions. While, on the other hand, capitalistic farming and landlordism, superimposed by the State, have overridden the communal interests of the village system, on the other hand *Jimutavahana* and others developed individualistic concepts of property which dealt a serious blow to communal notions in the joint family and the coparcenary village community.”³

The traditional social stratification of India was also affected by the Muslim rule, because the Muslims brought with them a new type of social system. We have already noted Sir Denzil Ibbetson's view that the Islamic invasion instead of slackening the caste rule only strengthened them. On the other hand, many lower caste Hindus transferred their allegiance to Islam. Particularly in northern India, where orthodox Hinduism had a greater hold upon the masses, caste monopoly rule became more rigid, while in Bengal and Kashmir, which were far away from the centres of orthodox Hinduism, Islam could make rapid headway and secured many converts. Under the Muslim rule the Khshatriyas were no longer the political rulers of society. The elimination of the Khshatriyas from political power gave more and more power to the Brahmins, and with the increase of the power of the Brahmins, Hindu society became more and more rigid in caste matters. We may sum up the discussion of this section with a quotation from H. Mukherjee, "Under the Muslim rule, the country did not enter on an entirely new era in its history, but only on a stage in the great social development which had been going on since the first dawn of Indian history, and remains yet to be completed.Arab or Turk, did not appear too repulsive to the masses who had seen Huns, Scythians, Kushans, Greeks, Persians and Rajputs ruling over them. In Sind, for example, the Hindu *Jat* offered to help the Arabs, who were welcomed also by other outcastes. Islam with its militant affirmations and suspicious of the sophisticated subtleties of the Hindu mind, made big advances, sometimes with the

³ Radhakamal Mukherjee, *Democracies of the East* (London: P.S. King & Son Ltd., 1923), pp. 310-311. Also Cf.—"Conditions of the upper class Hindus must, doubtless, have been much deteriorated; but it is probable that many of the Afghan officers, averse to business, or frequently called away from their homes to attend their chiefs, farmed out their estates to the opulent Hindus, who were also permitted to retain advantages of manufactures and commerce."—J.N. Das Gupta, quoting Stuart, *Bengal in the Sixteenth Century*, (Calcutta: Published by the University of Calcutta, 1914), p. 46.

sword but often without it; many Hindus, beyond the pale and denuded of elementary social rights, must have found emancipation even in forced conversion. A new element was entering Indian life which resisted absorption, or re-absorption into the infinitely eclectic and elastic social system of Hinduism.”⁴

SECTION II

The Nature of British Conquest

Even before the British rule, the Indian social structure was undergoing a significant change. A middle class was gradually growing in the trading centres of India, which was destined to play a great role in the future political and economic life of the country. It was principally because of the impact of the general international trends and the development of the European commercial stations, dotted around the coast. With the decline of the centralized Mughal power, the small but extremely rich and extravagant upper class dwindled, and a new aristocracy composed of the city merchants and traders emerged. For a description of how greatly trade flourished in the eighteenth century, we may refer to one of the first English Governors, Verelst, who wrote:

“The Bengal silks, cloths, etc., were dispersed in a vast amount to the west and north, inland as far as Guzrat, Lahore and even Ispahan.”⁵

⁴ Hirendranath Mukherjee, *India Struggles For Freedom* (Bombay: Kutub Publishers, 1946), p.14.

⁵ M.N. Roy, *India in Transition* (Geneve: J.B. Target, 1922), p. 99.

Again Burke said, "There are to be found a multitude of cities not exceeded in population and trade by those of the first class in Europe; merchants and bankers who have once vied in capital with the Bank of England, whose money had often supported a tottering state and preserved their governments in the midst of war and desolation; millions of indigenous manufactures and mechanics."⁶

Just before the rise of the British power we find the following picture of Mughal India: "In spite of a variety of imposts, fines and exactions a class of rich shopkeepers, traders and financiers developed in the larger towns of India. In the Imperial capital, Delhi, Mandelso records that there were 80 caravan-saraies for foreign merchants, most of them three stories high, with very noble lodgings, store houses, vaults and stables belonging to them. It was estimated by Marique (1629-1643) that at the town of Patna there were as many as 600 brokers and middlemen most of whom were wealthy. Similarly in Dacca money was heaped up in such large quantities in the houses of the Kataris that, being difficult to count, it used commonly to be weighed. Similarly in Bengal there were the Seths of Murshidabad who represented a most influential banking and financial house, advanced money to both farmers of revenue and Nawabs (feudal rulers) of Bengal, and wielded great political influence at the time of the advent of the English in that province."⁷

Syed Ghulam Hussain Khan, an erudite Indian scholar living at the time of British ascendancy, remarked that the great financier Jagat Seth's grandson, Fath Chand, could pay a bill of exchange at sight for a crore of rupees (i.e. £1,000,000 sterling).

⁶ Loc. cit.

⁷ Radhakamal Mukherjee, *The Economic History of India, 1600-1800* (London, etc.: Longmans Green & Co., n.d. 1946?) pp. 76-77.

“In the native administration”, he adds, “this house was security for the renters of the revenue, and thus the collections in general passed through their hands.”⁸ In the seventeenth and eighteenth century India therefore we find conditions similar to those of Europe when capitalism was making its first headway and the financiers were supplying the needs of the feudal princes and kings for waging wars as well as for running the day to day administration. “In the latter part of the eighteenth century, there came into existence in India a prosperous trading class with considerable capital accumulated in its hand. This trading class was largely responsible for undermining the foundations of feudalism in the days of decay of the Moghul Empire. All the big landowners as well as the rulers of the various independent states that sprang up on the ruins of the Moghul Empire, were heavily indebted to this class of usurious traders. The land was rapidly passing out of the hands of the hereditary feudal owners into the control of usury and trade capitals. In the middle of the eighteenth century in the province of Bengal alone, there were several million people employed in one industry—that of cotton spinning and weaving.So this class of traders was the advance guard of the

⁸ Monckton Jones, *Warren Hastings in Bengal*, Oxford Historical and Literary Studies (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1918), p. 22. Compare the description given by Henry See about the European development. “Moreover, the Crusades opened the East and gave an opportunity to the Italian traders—a condition which promoted the accumulation of capital and thus furthered the early economic development of the Italian republics. The resulting system of capitalism was concerned mainly with commercial affairs and did not take hold of industry except in some towns of Italy and the Low Countries. Meanwhile, however, financial capitalism had already appeared. It developed mainly, during the Middle Ages, as an outgrowth of commercial capitalism; but the financial needs of the kings, princes and cities also contributed toward building up of the large fortunes of some of the capitalists—the financiers of Arras, for example and William of Duvenvoorde.”—Henri See, *Modern Capitalism*, its origin and evolution, Transl. by B. Vanderblue and George F. Doriot (New York: Adelphi, 1928), p. 25.

For a contemporary account of the House of Jagat Seth *vide* William Bolts, *Considerations on Indian Affairs* (London: Printed for J. Almon etc., 1772-1775). Out of print, to be found in the Columbia University Library, New York, pp. 156-157.

coming Indian bourgeoisie and would have developed into the modern capitalist class had not its normal growth been obstructed.”⁹

But even in its decay the feudal authority tried its utmost to exercise vexatious controls over the commercial community, who could not think of capturing political power because of their social weakness. Therefore we find that during the period just preceding the British ascendancy the Indian commercial classes were flocking around the new trading centres of India, such as, Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, etc., founded by the European traders, to save themselves from vexatious exactions. These commercial centres therefore became “free cities” (so to speak) for the rising Indian bourgeoisie. It is important here to remember that though the British won political sovereignty at the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the basis of the three important commercial stations was laid much earlier, by the founding of Madras 1639, Bombay in 1668 and Calcutta in 1700. Professor Seeley expressed the opinion that the British conquest of India took place in a most “absent minded fashion”. He says that a few traders went to India for trade, but they quite reluctantly became the founders of the biggest territorial empire for the British Crown. But this is far from the truth. The British traders found that the power of the feudal princes was greatly undermined by the internecine warfare and they sought to take advantage of this weakness of the native princes. As far back as 1687, Sir Josiah Child, the Governor of Surat (near Bombay) pointed out that the developments in India were “forming us into the condition of sovereign State in India”, and recommended that the Company “establish, the foundations of large, well-grounded, sure English Dominion in India for all time to come”.¹⁰ As far back as 1829,

⁹ M. N. Roy, *op.cit.*, p. 61.

J.M. Richardson was writing about the nature of the East India Company's conquest of India: "The East India Company profess to be a company of merchant adventurers trading to the East. A very badly-conducted commercial concern it has been, leading to ruinous results upon its trading transactions even in the days of its greatest seeming prosperity. It ought rather to be considered as an army of military adventurers conquering the East. Its commercial proceedings make up a very small part of its history; and a part which reflects no honour on those who had the guidance of it. It appears from the best authorities, that the commercial losses of the Company have been enormous, and that they have been covered, either by exactions on the people of India, in the form of produce or tribute, or taxes on the people of England in the shape of monopolies; and thus have the dividends on East India Stock been long discharged."¹¹

Again, we find William Bolts writing in 1772-1775: "From a society of mere traders, confined by charter to the employment of six ships and six pinnaces yearly, the Company are become sovereigns of extensive, rich and populous kingdoms, with a standing army of above sixty thousand men at their command. In this new situation of the society, so widely different from its original institution, their true commercial interests appear almost entirely misunderstood or neglected; and it may be safely said, there is scarcely any public spirit among their leaders, either in England or in India. The loaves and fishes are the grand, almost the sole object. The question, How many lacks shall I put in my pocket? or How many sons, nephews, or dependents

¹⁰ W.C. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 326; and also *vide* George Birdwood, *op. cit.*, p. 230 and also the footnote on the same page.

¹¹ *Westminster Review*, No. XXII, Oct. 1929; to be had in the Columbia University Library, New York, under the heading—"India History Pamphlets."

shall I provide for, at the expense of the miserable inhabitants of the subjected dominions? are those which of late have been the foremost to be propounded by the chiefs of the Company on both sides of the Ocean. Hence the dominions in Asia..... have been abandoned, as lawful prey, to every species of speculators; in so much so that many of the servants of the Company, after exhibiting such scences of barbarity as can scarcely be paralleled in the history of any country, have returned to England loaded with wealth; where introducing themselves in borough or East-India-Stock influence, they set justice at defiance, either in the cause of their country or of oppressed innocence.”¹²

There is no doubt that the British early realized the role that they were going to play in the future Indian political life and therefore prepared themselves consciously for that—there was no question of “absent mindedness”, as Seeley says. Along with the right to build warehouses they demanded the right to build fortifications and also began to mint coins in the fashion of European cities, which right was never exercised by any Indian city any time in Indian history.¹³ In the words of Lord Palmerston, we can sum up the history of the British expansion in India : “The original settlers began with a factory, the factory grew into a fort, the fort expanded into a district and the district into a province.” The feudal princes in whose do-

¹² Bolts, *op. cit.*, pp. iv-v.

¹³ “The earliest known coin of the Bombay mintage are the four rupees in the British museum, dated 1675, 1677, and 1678, respectively.The money circulated by the Company never bore the effigy of any British sovereign until 1837, when they ceased to coin in the name of the titular emperors of Delhi, and stamped their rupees with the head of King William IV.”—Birdwood, *op. cit.*, p. 223. Max Weber says that the printing of coins by the city in the West had special significance in the development of western city and western capitalism. He says, “In China, there were no cities like Florence which could have created a standard coin and guided the state in monetary policies.”—Max Weber, *Religion of China*, Translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth (Glencoe, Ill, Free Press, 1951), p. 13. What is true of China is also true of India in this respect.

mains the British traders were building the fortifications saw the danger in it and protested: "Though he (Nawab Alivardi Khan, independant feudal ruler of Bengal, died in 1756, one year before the British victory at Plassey) allowed them to fortify their settlements against the Marathas, he had no intention of allowing them to acquire sufficient strength for purposes of resistance to himself, and to all requests for permission to increase their fortifications he replied, 'You are merchants, what need have you of a fortress? Being under my protection, you have no enemies to fear'." ¹⁴

Due to the breakup of the powerful and centralized Mughal Empire the feudal princes had to face internecine warfare, and therefore often failed to protect the lives and properties of these foreign commercial communities. Thus the commercial powers had a basis for raising an army of their own. As we have observed earlier, social revolution had already occurred in England when the British East India Company captured power in India, which further facilitated their political ventures in India. As the Wars of the Roses in England and the Thirty Years' War in Germany paved the path for the rise of the European bourgeoisie, the downfall and disintegration of the Mughal Empire after the death of Emperor Aurangzeb (1707) ¹⁵ and consequent internecine warfare between the rival principalities paved the path for the rise of the English merchant adventurers in India as a political power. Due to the peculiarity of the Indian situation, which we have tried to explain in the previous pages, the Indian bourgeoisie failed to capture political power in the

¹⁴ S.C. Hill, *Bengal in 1756-1758* (London: Published for the Government of India, John Murray, 1905), Vol-I, p. xxxi.

¹⁵ "In 1707 Aurangzeb died, after a reign of upwards of 50 years; and from the period of his death commenced those internal troubles which gradually broke up the great Mogul Empire, and paved the way for the conquests of the Honourable East India Company." Birdwood, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

towns and the feat was performed by a foreign commercial power.

SECTION III

The Impact of British Rule and the Rise of New Social Classes

The emergence of new social classes in the Indian subcontinent is the direct result of the British rule. British rule brought in a new economy, a new type of state system and state administrative machinery and a new educational system.

The new social classes which emerged as a result of the British rule were unknown in pre-British India, because such an economy did not exist at that period. Speaking of the non-existence of such social classes in the sixteenth century, W.H. Moreland says, in his book, *India at the Death of Akbar* "There were at this time no lawyers, very few if any professional teachers, no journalists or politicians, no engineers, no forms of employment corresponding to modern railway, postal or irrigation services, or to factories and large workshops, few landholders in the modern sense, unless I am mistaken, scarcely any families living upon accumulated property; and if we remove these from middle classes as they exist to-day, we shall find that there is little left, beyond the families dependent on the various public offices."¹⁶

The process of the rise of the new classes was uneven among the different sections of society and in different regions of the country. This was also because of the peculiar nature of

¹⁶ W.H. Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar* (London: Macmillan, 1920), p. 27.

the pre-British Indian social stratification. According to the assumptions of that stratification, the different vocations were pursued by different castes as hereditary occupations. Thus in the pre-British India the banyans were mainly traders and shroffs and the Brahmins were the custodians of education among the Hindus. With the introduction of the new social economy, the Banyans were first (the other group was the Parsees) to take to modern capitalist commerce. Similarly, Brahmins among the Hindus were the first to take to modern education. It was mainly from that group that the modern intelligentsia and a middle class was recruited. Again, the impact of the British rule not only meant unequal development between different castes but also between different communities. Thus, for many political, religious, and social reasons, Muslims were slow to take to western education and therefore were left behind. Again capitalist enterprise did not expand with equal speed in all regions of the country. The British rule penetrated through the important sea-ports such as, Bombay and Calcutta and therefore the industrial enterprises first began in those areas. Jute and cotton factories were first started in those areas which ultimately created new classes of industrialists and proletariat. The capitalist enterprise meant a greater divergence between urban and rural life which was hitherto unknown in Indian history. We have already examined the nature of the contrasting features of the pre-British urban and rural life. We shall now examine how the British rule created new social classes in two sections of Indian society.

The following are the social classes, in rural areas created as a result of the British rule with a new tone and orientation:

- (1) The new class of landlords created by the British.
- (2) The tenants under these landlords.
- (3) The class of peasant proprietors divided into upper, middle and lower strata.

- (4) Modern merchant class.
- (5) Modern money lender class.

Similarly in the urban areas new classes came into existence with the new economy. The most important of them are the following :

- (1) The modern class of capitalists, commercial, industrial and financial.
- (2) The modern working class.
- (3) The class of petty traders and shopkeepers.
- (4) The professional classes such as the technicians, physicians, lawyers, teachers, journalists, managers of firms, clerks, and others comprising the intelligentsia and the educated middle class.

Rural Areas

The creation of a new class of landlords by the British in place of the former revenue collectors is an important phenomenon. The basic character of the pre-British Indian society was feudal. By changing the fundamental notions of such a society through the introduction of their own concepts of land ownership the British struck at the very roots of the feudal structure. We have earlier examined the characteristic differences in the basic assumptions of the two systems—the European and the Indian—and have enumerated the causes of the differential developments in Europe and India. We have also challenged the popular view that the British introduced the new land system because of their “misconceptions” of the Indian notions of land ownership. The purpose of the creation of this new class of landlords with proprietary rights is clear. British merchant capitalism while it was expanding in India, first came in contact

with the native banyans and *mutshaddis* who were working as the agents of this new capitalism in India and the British felt it necessary to satisfy this class of native merchants. By the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793, the old landlords were not at all benefitted; in fact in many cases they were gradually ruined and eliminated. The new land policy was not meant for their benefit but for the benefit of the native bourgeoisie. "The representatives of the British bourgeoisie recognized in the Indian traders and speculators their rival, historically destined to compete for the right of monopoly of exploiting the country. In the pious request of the English landed aristocracy assembled in Parliament, not to wipe off landlordism in India, was found a way to side-track the energies of Indian capital. Feudalism as a hereditary element in social economics had already been irretrievably undermined; the land had been freed from feudal fetters. By the Permanent Settlement Act, the land liberated from feudal ownership was given to the trading class still in its infancy."¹⁷

We again quote from William Bolts, a witness of contemporary events even before the introduction of the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793: He says, "Thus, in particular, from the invasion of Nader Shah downwards, the independent Nabobs, or Subadars of Bengal, have in general paid but little attention to the hereditary rights of the ancient Rajahs, or Zamindars; and since the English East India Company became the Sovereigns of Bengal, less ceremony has been used with them; many of the lowest class of banyans having been put over them, or in their places as well as in every department of government."¹⁸

We have already noted that with the decline of the centralized Mughal administration the revenue collectors were con-

¹⁷ M.N. Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.

¹⁸ William Bolts, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

solidating their positions and began to treat their offices as hereditary and the land under their jurisdictions as almost their properties. At the time of the decline of centralised feudal power, after the death of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707, we find Murshid Kuli Khan, the revenue chief of Bengal, laying the foundation of the present zamindari of Bengal. Thus in 1722, he divided the whole of Bengal into 13 Chaklas and constituted them into 25 Zamindaries and 13 jaigirdaries. This settlement is a great landmark in the history of the evolution of landlordism in Bengal and is known as the "Jama Kamal Tumari".¹⁹ This is essentially the basis upon which the later British system was built. The zamindars had no doubt consolidated their position at the time of the British ascendancy. But the British did it expressly and gave the zamindar the legal title to proprietary rights. Such an express recognition led to very important changes in the land relations which had so long existed in Bengal. Together with other factors, it rapidly led to the disintegration of the village communities, which had been the basis of production. The customary rights, so long enjoyed by the cultivators and protected by the village community gradually began to give way to a private relation between the zamindar and the cultivator. Moreover, replacement of the landed aristocracy by the banyans, dissolved the old feudal ties and land in most cases became a profitable marketable commodity. This further accelerated the process of disintegration in Bengal.

Our purpose here is not the enumeration of the good or bad effects of the new system of landlordism introduced by the British. Our purpose is to find out how this landlordism affected the formation of new social classes in the place of the old ones and how that affected the traditional social stratification in the country.

¹⁹ F.D. Ascoli, *Early Revenue History of Bengal*, and the Fifth Report (Oxford at the Clarendon Press), pp. 25-26.

As a logical outcome of the introduction of these new land relations which recognized expressly the proprietary rights of the zamindars, a hierarchy of intermediaries developed between the zamindar and the cultivating tenant in Bengal, viz., moneylenders, absentee landlords, sub-infeudated tenure holders, and merchants, peasant proprietors, etc. These classes together with the new class of land labourers were unknown in pre-British India.

It is true that the class of moneylenders and merchants existed in rural areas in pre-British India. But they performed different sorts of functions and occupied different types of positions in the village community. It is true that the pre-British moneylender was often relentless in his exactions, but he played almost an insignificant role in that economy. He occasionally lent money to the village agriculturist or artisan, and when the interest claims were unconscionable, they used to be referred to the village panchayat. Moreover, the alienation and the transfer of the land was controlled by the village community and therefore the moneylender could not eject the debtor from his soil for non-payment of the interest claims. Again, the village merchant in the pre-British period played a very insignificant part in the village economy. In the former economy he used to supply the village community with commodities which the village could not locally produce. With the introduction of capitalism village products began to enter the world market more and more and the importance of the village merchant began to increase. Since their roles have been transformed, the classes of modern merchants and moneylenders in rural areas may be described as new classes linked up with the new capitalist economy, performing functions quite different from those which they performed in the village economy of pre-British India.

The new social classes which were thus emerging as a result of the British rule were being recruited from all sections of

society. These classes which, became in the new regime the agents for British imperialism in the country were mainly recruited from the Indian merchant class, who helped the British merchant capitalists in the expansion of their trade and empire. Therefore we find that gradually the new merchant class was not only monopolizing the trade of the country, but also buying off the zamindaries, by which they acquired not only an object of great economic gain, but also the social position associated with this. The traditional social stratification, which was so long based on *birth* now began to give way to that of money. The Indian social classes therefore became more fluid and mobile under the impact of British rule.

Urban Areas

With the introduction of British rule in the urban areas greater changes in the social stratification and social classes were effected. During the pre-British period the urban commercial classes were satisfied to play a role subordinate to the courts and noblemen, the soldiers, officials, priests, and pilgrims, who collectively constituted the "consumer class" and who were in the possession of the towns. But under the British rule, all production, rural or urban, agricultural or industrial, became production for the market. As a result the internal markets expanded and the class of traders engaged in internal trade grew in numbers. It was also during the British rule that India became linked more intimately and extensively with the world market. The class of merchants who now traded with foreign countries steadily increased in importance. The sharp division between urban and rural trade now disappeared. The new class of merchants which was created by this eco-

nomy now traded in all production, rural, urban, agricultural or industrial and its merchandise began to be sold and resold in the internal and external markets. It was from the merchant ranks that the Indian industrial bourgeoisie was ultimately recruited. The accumulation of capital in the hands of the merchant class and also in the hands of certain sections of the landlord class as well as wealthy members of the professional classes, led to the rise of Indian-owned textile, mining and such other industries. The new bourgeoisie created by the new economy soon became the leaders in practically all fields of national life. Under its leadership modern schools, colleges, and universities came into existence. It stimulated scientific and industrial research. These together soon gave birth to Indian nationalism, because the bourgeoisie found that it could not further expand in India as long as the British were allowed to carry on their imperialistic rule.

Next in importance to the rising bourgeoisie in the urban areas are the professional classes. It has been well said by G.T. Garrat that the British rule gave India another caste—i.e., the middle class. We have found in our analysis that a middle class existed even during the pre-British period. But it was a very insignificant middle class. The new social economy introduced by the British transformed the role of the insignificant middle class that existed in the pre-British period. In the pre-British period village panchayat and caste-committees performed all judicial, administrative and even economic functions. The village priest and the village school master constituted the village intelligentsia. In the pre-British Indian cities, the situation was almost the same—the city intelligentsia served the interests and inclinations of the small number of city princes, wealthy merchants, noblemen, etc.—i.e., they were not public practitioners of their skills. But in the new economy they

became public practitioners of their skills, which greatly removed their former shackles.

The creation of a city proletariat is also an important feature introduced by the new economy. Whatever might be the extent of the class consciousness today of this important section of the city population, they are destined to play a significant role in the future development of the country.²⁰

²⁰ For this section on "The Impact of British rule and the Rise of New Social Classes" I have depended mainly upon A.R. Desai *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (Bombay, India: Oxford University Press, 1948) chapter on "Rise of New Social Classes" and K.B. Krishna, *Problem of Minorities* or "Communal Representation in India" (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1939), the first few chapters.

PART II

CHANGING MUSLIM SOCIETY

CHAPTER V

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN ISLAM

SECTION I

The Peculiar Nature of the Social Stratification Among Muslims: Some General Considerations

The economic development during the British rule has been uneven in different sections of Indian society and in different regions of India. Indian society, even before British rule was pretty sharply divided into two great divisions—Hindu and Muslim. In some regions of the Indian subcontinent the Hindus predominate, while in others Muslims predominate. Because of such a peculiar nature of Indian society, types of development have taken place in the Muslim community, distinct in some respects from those of the Hindus. Again, within the Muslim community itself, various sections have been differently affected. Such a development of the Muslim community in different regions of the Indian subcontinent has led to the formation of new classes and a new social stratification. In this part we shall confine our attention primarily to the Bengali Muslims and some recent developments in East Pakistan.

The original home of Islam is the desert of Arabia, while Hinduism is the out come of the Indian soil. It is therefore natural that the assumptions of these systems would differ in some important respects. But although Islam originated in an altogether different environment, it had to adjust itself to the requirements of an agricultural civilization in India. It will

therefore be instructive to analyse the class structure in original Islam, because even now when class or caste questions arise in East Pakistan among the Muslims, solutions are sought by referring to the class or caste questions in early Islam and how this problem was dealt with at that period.

SECTION II

Social Stratification in Early Islam

It is well known that the Islamic revolt in the initial stages was organized primarily with the discontented poorer classes against the rich commercial class of Mecca. This point will be clear from the following which describes the social situation in which Islam emerged in Arabia:--“Due to the commercial orientation of the Meccan society.....the patron-client tie, formally based on fictional relationship of kin, actually took more and more the guise of an exploitative relation between members of different class groups. This relation was reinforced by the prevalence of wage-payment and the institution of debt-slavery. It has been pointed out repeatedly that the bulk of Muhammad's first converts came from the group of clients and from the slaves of the city. (i)When Muhammad first embarked on his career, the excitement of the slaves of Mecca was so intense that a leading slave-owner who had one hundred slaves removed them from the city because he feared that they might become converts. (ii) When Muhammad besieged Taif, he called on the slaves of the town to desert to his camp where they would receive their freedom.”(iii)¹

¹ Eric R. Wolf, “The Social Organization of Mecca and the Rise of Islam” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. VII, No. 4, Winter, 1951. p. 336. (i) Caetani, *Annali dell 'Islam*, Vol. I, p. 240. (ii) Aloys Sprenger, *The Life of Mohammed*, 1851, p. 159. (iii) *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. I, p.80.

In such a context Islam emerged in Arabia. But once the revolution was accomplished, "power quickly passed out of the hands of the Koreish who had fought against them. It may be said that Muhammad accomplished for the Meccan traders that which they could not accomplish themselves : that is, the organization of the state power."² Thus, though the revolt itself had a democratic content, due to the transference of power to the commercial aristocracy, especially under the Ummayyad dynasty, the democratic element was subjected to the requirements of a stratified society and consequently the new Islamic system could not touch the basic dynamic of the society which produced it. As we find, Islamic revolt was initially effected with the help of the slaves and the lower classes, but with the increase of the power of the commercial class, the Islamic system had to acknowledge the right of the rich Meccans to trade and possess slaves, although manumission of slaves was made a great act of piety. "Honour God, and associate none with Him; and show kindness unto parents, relations, orphans, the poor, and the neighbour who is kin of you, and who is not, and to your trusted friend, and the traveller, and those whom your right hand possesses (i.e., slaves); for God loveth not the arrogant and the proud. (Sura 4,40)"³

² Eric R. Wolf, *Ibid.* pp. 352-353.

³ Robert Roberts, *The Social Laws of the Qoran* (London : Williams and Norgate, Ltd., 1925), p. 57. Robert Roberts further says, "If Muhammad could not abolish slavery, he has certainly done what he could to secure for slaves a humane treatment. And if present-day Muhammadans disregard his injunctions, it is not fair to hold the Prophet himself responsible for it.it must not be forgotten that the legislation of the Qoran was enacted for seventh century people." Again, Reuben Levy says, "His (i.e., the Prophet Muhammad's) injunctions recommending humane treatment of slaves (Koran 16:73, 4:40) and making it a meritorious act to emancipate them (Koran 24:33, etc.) indicate that he intended some amelioration in the conditions of slaves, but neither from the Koran nor from the 'Traditions' is it possible to infer that the abolition of slavery was intended. The doctrine that Islam bestowed equality on all who accepted it can have meant no more than that the Arabs of Muhammad's time need no longer pride themselves on their ancestry, but it is nevertheless a fact that as Muhammadanism grew older, the stigma attaching to the status of the slave gradually

In his farewell address at Mina, the Prophet said : "And your slaves! see that ye feed them with such food as ye eat yourselves, and clothe them with the like clothing as ye wear yourselves; and if they commit a fault which ye are inclined not to forgive, sell them, for they are the servants of the Lord, and are not to be tormented."⁴

Again, Islam strictly prohibited the taking of interest of all kinds. It should be remembered that there is a distinction between debt slaves and slaves captured in war or bought from a foreign country. In case of a revolt by slaves of the second category, they could be killed easily without producing any kind of commotion in the community. But in the case of debt slaves this was not the case. Any mass killing of debt slaves would produce serious reactions in the community, because the slaves are recruited from it. It seems, success in the revolts in early Islam was also due to the fact that a large class of debt slaves probably came into existence in and around Mecca, just before the rise of Islam. Because the debt slaves and other debtor classes were part and parcel of the community which produced Islam, it had to make special legislations for them. This is probably the reason why the Quran so strictly prohibits the taking of interest of all kinds.⁵ Further, Islam repeatedly insisted on the virtue disappeared. Liberty could not be granted through conversion to Islam any more than 'economic' equality could be imposed on all Moslems by their common faith."—Reuben Levy, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Islam* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1931-1933), p. 105.

⁴ See Footnote No. 3.

⁵ Maurice Gaudesfroy-Demombynes says, "The *riba* (interest) was forbidden by the Quran (2.276), as a reaction against the habits of usury prevalent among the Qurashites, who were accustomed, in case of non-payment of a debt and the accrued interest, to grant the debtor a delay, but to exact twice the sum due. It is not known what circumstances caused Muhammad, whom traditions present to us as a former merchant, to prohibit so completely all lending to interest, and to regulate so strictly the exchange of precious metals and articles of value; this prohibition has weighed, and still weighs, heavily on dealings between Muslims."—Maurice Gaudesfroy-Demombynes, *Muslim Institutions*, translated from French by John P. Macgregor (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950) p. 190.

of alms-giving to its followers. But these measures, although they were humane and did much to remove the misery of the poorest classes of Arabia of the Prophet's time, did not establish economic or social equality. However, some of the teachings of Islam have helped to mitigate the sharp class differences that existed before Islam.

“ ‘There are no genealogies in Islam,’ says a traditional saying. The very act of adherence to Islam implied an individual decision into which considerations of kin did not enter. ‘Truly, the most worthy of honour in the sight of God is he who fears Him most,’ not the individual who is most famous and most powerful. When Muhammad entered Mecca, he declared, ‘God has put an end to the pride of noble ancestry, you are all descended from Adam and Adam from dust, most noblest amongst you is the man who is most pious.’ ”⁶

But in spite of such a nature of the rise and revolt of Islam and in spite of the teachings of Islam against genealogy and caste pride, the Meccan aristocracy soon assumed the leadership of the new Islamic community. And to this day such a notion of aristocracy prevails in the Islamic world. Noblest of birth, therefore, is a person who can claim a real or fictitious descent from the Prophet ; next are those who can claim descent from his clan i.e., the Quraysh, and so on. As Reuben Levy says, “Once Islam was adopted by peoples beyond the confines of Arabia, the ordinary full-blooded free Beduin tribesman, the *sarih*, inevitably regarded himself as superior of his new foreign converts. In the same way that the old nobility resisted the assumption of equality by other Arabs, so the inhabitants of Arabia as a whole refused to consider foreigners as being their peers, in spite of the demand of their common faith that social and genealogical differences were to be wiped out and all tribal

⁶ Eric R. Wolf, *op. cit.*, pp. 344-345.

jealousies were to cease—seeing that ‘all believers are brothers’ (Koran, 49:10). Yet the Koran, by insisting that God was the creator of the diversity of tongues and colours amongst the believers, (Koran, 30,21) made it logical for any Moslems—including Negroes and others traditionally regarded in Arabia as inferior beings—to consider themselves equal of any other Moslems whoever they might be.”⁷

Again, Gustave E. von Gruenbaum says, “Islam was not a social movement in the sense that it aimed at reforming the existing order. But while Muhammad did not attack the distribution of property as he found it, he attacked the traditional foundation of Arab hierarchy deprecating noble ancestry as of no avail in the eyes of the Lord and by stressing the equality of all believers within the fold of the new faith. Political considerations did not permit him to adhere too strictly to this principle. Powerful adversaries were reconciled, potential disloyalty forestalled by economic concessions of considerable magnitude as well as tacit recognition of social prerogatives. While on the one hand Islam promoted egalitarianism, on the other, it strengthened the traditional aristocratic proclivities of the Arabs by providing a new and, to the Muslim, unimpeachable basis for social distinction, the closeness to the Prophet in blood and in faith. There was added to the pagan nobility of descent the *ashraf*, nobles of the Prophet’s line, of his clan, of his tribe, the offspring of the Meccan companions of his migration, *muhajirun*, and his Medinese helpers, *ansar*. Throughout the Abbasid Empire the Hashimids, the members of the Prophet’s family, enjoyed financial privileges.”⁸

Islam therefore introduced a new type of social stratification, in which the highest were those who were the closest to the Pro-

⁷ Levy, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82.

⁸ Gustave E. Von Gruenbaum, *Medieval Islam* (Chicago, Ill. : The University Press, 1946), p. 199.

phet of Islam in blood, in faith, and in geography. In the distribution of the annuity from the State's treasury this principle of the new social stratification was followed. During the Caliphate of Hazrat Umar (the second Caliph of Islam) the treasury of Islam was augmented a thousandfold by the addition of the wealth of the conquered territories. Hazrat Umar held counsel with the most distinguished companions of the Prophet as to what was to be done with this immense wealth. All agreed that the entire state-revenue was the common property of the Muslims and as such should be distributed among them. Accordingly, a general census of all Muslims was taken. "In drawing this census they carefully adhered to the principle of the division of the entire people into tribes and families. Beginning, as it might be expected, with the family of the Prophet, they made other Arab tribes follow in succession according to their relationship or intimacy with the Prophet.

"Omar began his census with the widows of the Prophet. He placed 'Aysha' (the wife of the Prophet) at the head of the list and assigned to her an annuity of 12,000 dirhams.Some who had enjoyed the special favours of the Prophet, received an exceptionally high annuity, i.e., 4,000 dirhams. After this he arranged the great mass of the tribes according to their position in the tribal register, their knowledge of the Koran and their military services."⁹

Hazrat Umar no doubt insisted throughout his Caliphal career that Islam levelled all distinctions of birth, but he was not ready to concede that in matters of faith all Muslims were on an equal footing. He said, "I will not make him, who fought against the Prophet, the equal of him that fought with him."¹⁰

⁹ Von Kremer, *The Orient Under the Caliphs*, Transl. by S. Khunda Bukhsh (Calcutta: Published by the University of Calcutta, 1930), pp.76-77.

¹⁰ Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 81—"Beginning with those who had been earliest associated with Muhammad, he gave to Muhajirun and Ansar—respectively

Even the Islamic jurisprudence recognizes this rule of precedence. The Prophet taught that in case of marriage, the considerations of birth should be given special attention. Because of this, even to this day the Muslim upper classes of India and Pakistan and elsewhere use that saying of the Prophet in support of maintaining their caste pride and class distinctions. The Prophet said, "Take ye care, that none contract in marriage but their proper guardians, and that they be not so contracted except with their *equals* (*kufv*)."

According to the Sunni School of Jurisprudence, six ingredients are necessary to produce *equality* (*kufv*) of which descent or lineage (*nasab*) is the most important one. As regards this descent or lineage, certain rules of precedence¹¹ are laid down, which are as follows :

1. An Arab is superior to a non-Arab (*Ajami*) Muslim.
2. Amongst Arabs,

- (i) The descendents of Hazrat Ali (i.e., the descendents of the Prophet. As the Prophet had no son, descendents of his son-in-law Hazrat Ali, are regarded as the descendents of the Prophet in the Islamic societies) come first.

- (ii) The Quraysh rank above all other Arabs, save Hazrat Ali's descendents.

3. The descendents of the Caliphs, though born and bred in other countries, are equal to domiciled Arabs.

the Prophet's fellow-emigrants to Medina and his helpers there—who had fought with him at the battle of Badr, the sum of 5,000 dirhams each. The Muhajirun and Ansar who had not fought there, received 4,000 dirhams each, their sons received 2,000 each, their wives between 200 and 600 each, Meccans 800 and other Moslems between 300 and 500 each. (Yakub ibn Ibrahim [Abu Yusuf], *Kitab-al-kharaj* [Bulaq, 1302], p. 24). The sums in themselves have no significance, but they indicate the kind of distinctions that Moslems began to recognize."—Loc. cit.

¹¹ E.A.H. Blunt, *The Caste System of Northern India* (London, etc.: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 192-193.

4. A learned non-Arab (Ajami) is equal to an ignorant Arab, even if he is a descendent of Ali; for "the worth of learning is greater than the worth of family."

5. A qazi (a Muslim judge) or a Faqih (a Muslim jurist theologian) ranks higher than a merchant and a merchant than a tradesman.

So stands the Sunni Law.

It might appear, *prima facie*, that the strict observance of such a rule which limits a man's choice of a mate to families of equal lineage, must necessarily produce a system of endogamy as restrictive as Hinduism. But fortunately this is not the case. According to the Islamic law, although *equal* (kufv) marriages are preferred, *unequal* (ghair-kufv) marriages are not void. Therefore, considerations of "caste" and class distinctions different from those enumerated above arose in different Muslim societies, because different conditions prevailed in other parts of the Muslim world (for example, the problem of Arab and non-Arab, although very important in Arabia, is not, and cannot be, so important in East Pakistan).

CHAPTER VI

MUSLIM SOCIAL CLASSES OF EAST PAKISTAN

SECTION I

Social Classes in Islam in Indian Environment

From the standpoint of social classes and social stratification, the development of Islam in India has been peculiar. Popular Islam in India in many respects copied the essentials of Hindu beliefs, ideas, and social institutions and adjusted them to the Islamic system in a very strange way.

It will be interesting here to note that in an attempt to conform itself to the requirements of the Indian social system, Islam in India patterned its social classes roughly in imitation of the four main Hindu caste divisions. The Indian Muslims used to divide themselves usually into : (1) Syed, (2) Mughal, (3) Sheikh, and (4) Pathan; the Hindu counterpart being: (1) Brahmin, (2) Khshatriya, (3) Vaishya, and (4) Sudra.

Thus J. D. Cunningham, writing in 1903, remarked: "The Mahometans of India fancifully divided themselves into four classes, after the manner of the Hindus, viz., Syeds, Shekhs, Moghuls, and Puthans. All are noble, indeed, but the former two, as representing the tribe of Mahomet, and the direct progeny of Alee, his son-in-law, are pre-eminent. It is likewise a fact, at least in the north-west, that a Khutree convert from Hinduism, or any convert from Sikhism, is styled a Shekh, and that converts of inferior races are classed as Moghuls and Puthans. Doubtless a Brahmin who should become a Mahometan, would at once be classed among the Syeds."¹

¹ J.D. Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs* (Calcutta : Sanyal & Co., 25, Roy Bagan Street, 1903), p. 31.

William Crooke, in his review of Jafar Sharif's *Islam in India* (first published in 1832), said in 1921, "Islam in its orthodox type, does not permit the differentiation of its followers into castes. In theory, at least, all Mussalmans are brethren and can eat together, and though endogamy is the rule among certain tribes and castes, particularly in the case of those families which claim Arabic or Persian lineage, there is nothing to prevent intermarriage with strangers. But among the class of Mussalman converts from Hinduism the laws of endogamy and exogamy still have force, and the rule which prohibits eating with a stranger to the group are observed.

"Mussalmans in India are popularly divided into four groups: Sayyid, Shaikh, Moghal, Pathan."²

Although such patterning of the Islamic social organization took place in India, the "fanciful" (as J.D. Cunningham terms it in the previous quotation) fourfold division of the Muslim society does not correspond strictly to the Hindu caste structure in fact. It is also evident from the above quotations that the members of the major four groups were recruited from the various sections of the Muslim society and they also at times "freely" intermarried and therefore the fourfold system never became rigid like the Hindu caste system. As E.A.H. Blunt points out, "A Muslim may marry any woman outside the prohibited degrees (which are much the same as in English law).... The Hindu caste system is entirely incompatible with the tenets of Islam. And amongst the Muslims of foreign descent whose ancestors brought the religion of the Prophet into India, practice corresponds with theory. Sayyid, Shaikh, Pathan, Moghul, are not castes, though usually spoken of as such; they are not even tribes. They are merely names given to groups of tribes that are, or supposed to be, of similar blood."³

² William Crooke's Introduction to Jafar Sharif's *Qanun-i-Islam*, (London : Oxford University Press, 1921), Chapter I, "Ethnography", p. 9.

The above fourfold classification was so broadly-based that any body could claim to be included in one of those divisions, which is borne out by popular sarcastic proverb: "*Pesh az yin qassab budem, badazan gushtem sheikh : ghalla chun arzan shawad, insal syed meshawem.*"⁴ "The first year we were butchers, the next Sheikhs; this year, if prices fall, we shall become Syeds." The pseudo-Syeds have been on the increase not only in India but throughout the Muslim world, even from the beginning of Islamic history.

The census figures also show a tendency towards a broad division of the Muslim society into above fourfold classes:

Sayyid	1,657,000
Shaykh	33,392,000
Mughal	302,000
Pathan	3,564,000
Others	28,820,000
<hr/>	
Total,	68,735,000

Based on the Census of 1911.⁵

The figures show that *Sheikh* and *others* constitute by far the great majority of the Indian Muslim population. Again, within the Sheikhs themselves, on a further investigation, it would be found that there are different grades and different classes. Similar is the case with the Syeds, Mughals and Pathans.

In Bengal, as in other parts of India, among the Muslim lower classes, there are different grades or classes who maintain a hierarchical relationship on the basis of their occupations and

³ E.A.H. Blunt, *The Caste System of Northern India* (London : Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 189.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁵ Murray T. Titus, *Indian Islam* (London : Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 169.

professions, which are often hereditary. The lower classes get the name of their class or caste from their occupations and professions and among the lower classes there is a tendency to practice endogamy with the members of such occupations and professions. At present, due to social changes occupations and professions are changing in many cases, but individuals still retain the name of their past family profession as their "family names". Thus, I have found people using such titles as *Chakar* (i.e., domestic servant), etc., as their "family names", though these carry always a sense of lower status (if not to them, at least to others).

We therefore find that there are groups and classes of people among the Muslim population in Bengal (as in the rest of India) who are organized more or less like the Hindu castes. They are similar in many respects to the Hindu castes, but they are less rigid because Islam, theoretically at least, permits marriage between different classes of believers in Islam.

But according to the Hindu law, marriages cannot take place between the members of the different castes, except in very few exceptional cases. Therefore, in spite of the influence of Hinduism on Islam in India, there has always been a greater mobility and flexibility in the Islamic system. But at the same time the Hindu caste organization left its mark on the Indian Muslim social system in spite of the contrary efforts of Muslim-reforming priests.

Thus after emphasizing the democratic nature of the teachings of Islam, the author of the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, 1908, says, "In India, however, caste is in the air; its contagion has spread even to the Mohammedans, and we find its evolution proceeding characteristically on Hindu lines. In both communities foreign descent forms the highest claim to social distinction; in both promotion cometh from the west. As the twice-born Aryan is to the mass of the Hindus, so is the Mohammedan

of alleged Arab, Persian, Afghan, or Mughal origin to the rank and file of his coreligionists.”⁶

J. Talke in his study on “Islam in Bengal” in 1914, marked this feature among the Muslims in Bengal, when he said, “Socially, the community has had the misfortune to inherit the traits of both their Hindu and Moslem forbears. Caste prejudices have left their mark upon many. There are about 35 (thirty-five) separate Moslem castes in Bengal. We use the term advisedly, for in some cases the division is clear differentiation of race in others it means a kind of trade guild with strong Hindu caste significance. In fact, in many instances, the functional groups have become so distinct that they will never intermarry, nor even dine together. Foreign descent still forms the highest claim to social distinction.although now, since many descendants of converts by education and position have sprung to the fore, they too are receiving more honour than formerly, and are even sought after marriage with daughters of foreign extraction.”⁷

The census figures of 1911 (see p. 122) show that the *Sheikh* and *others* constitute by far the great majority of the Indian Muslim population. But a further investigation among the *Sheikhs* would show that in them there are different grades and different classes. Similar is the case with the *Syeds*, *Mughals* and *Pathans*. This is due to various causes—as Muslims in India found that claim to foreign descent increases one's prestige, people began to discover for themselves as far as possible foreign ancestry. Therefore, those who claimed a greater degree of foreign descent, and were recognized as such, they began to be regarded as socially superior. Education, economic, and social

⁶ *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. II, p. 329, as quoted by K.M. Ashraf, “Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan”, *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Letters*, Vol. I, 1935, p. 192.

⁷ John Talke, “Islam in Bengal” *The Muslim World*, Vol. IV, 1914, p. 12.

position accruing from land control and such other factors also played an important part in such a gradation.

Various factors therefore entered in determining the "caste" tendencies among the Muslims in Bengal. So many "castes" and "subcastes" jostle together that it is almost impossible to determine the respective status of each of them. Moreover, from locality to locality, the status, position, prestige and power of each of them would vary a great deal. For the convenience of study, it is necessary to find out some general rule by which we could classify them.

We have already found that the Indian Muslims had a tendency to classify themselves on a fourfold basis, but the increase in the number of the pseudo-Sheikhs, Mughals, Syeds and Pathans made such a classification meaningless, although such a broadly-based classification still has some meaning in the Muslim society of India and Pakistan. So some other basis of the classification of the Bengali Muslim society became a necessity. In Bengal, upto the early part of the twentieth century (and in some circles still now) Muslims, especially among the higher classes, used to divide the Muslim society into two broad divisions: (1) *Sharif* or *Ashraf* (i.e. noble born), and (2) *Atraf* or *Ajlaf* (low-born). This division of the Bengali Muslim society, it is sometimes forgotten, is in imitation of the ancient Arab practice. Still now in Arabia, the descendents of the Prophet's line and the members of the Quraysh tribe are regarded as belonging to the Sharif class. Levy says, "In modern Arabia the *Ashraf* or the descendents of the Prophet hold a position of some importance as landowners and often form separate communities. They have been acknowledged by all Arabs since the seventh century as persons of highest nobility, and the proudest Bedouin chief kisses the hand of the poorest of them. As a rule a *Sharif* gives his daughter in marriage to no one but a sharif. Yet in no

sense do *Ashraf* form a separate priestly caste or any particularly pious community.

“Beyond the confines of Arabia, Islam brought similar changes in the estimate of what constituted a claim to honours, so that relationship to the Prophet, however remote, and also wealth and political power, have all been counted. In modern Egypt those who reckon themselves descendents of the first Caliphs Abu Bakr and Omar are included among the *Ashraf*.”⁸

In a similar way, foreign ancestry coming from the west, (the west is nearer to Arabia and therefore nearer to the Prophet and his religion), that is, ancestry tracing its real or fictitious origins from Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, Central Asia, sometimes even from Northern India, was reckoned as Sharif ancestry in Bengal, provided such ancestry was associated with feudalism and land control. In Bengal, the Muslim foreign invaders looked down upon the new converts as belonging to the lower classes, who were called by them *Atraf*, *Ajlaf* (both signifying low-born) or *Arzal* (“lowest of all”), all of them signifying extreme contempt. Again Levy says, “Amongst the Bengal Muhammadans the *Ashraf* or upper class include all undoubted descendents of foreign Moslems (Arabs, Persians, Afghans, etc.) and converts from higher castes from Hindus. ‘Like higher caste Hindus they consider it degrading to accept menial service or to handle the plough’ (Indian Census Report, 1901, Part-I, p. 543) and look with contempt upon all other ranks of Bengal Moslems whom they call ‘*Ajlaf*’, ‘coarse rabble’. These include ‘functional groups’, such as weavers, cotton-carders, oil-pressers, barbers, tailors, etc., as well as converts of original humble castes. In some cases, a third class called *Arzal* or ‘lowest of all’ is added. It consists of very lowest castes such as the *Helalkhor*

⁸ Reuben Levy, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Islam* (London : Williams and Norgate, 1931-1933), Vol. I, pp. 96-97.

(sweepers, latrine and garbage cleaners) Lalbegi, Abdal, and Bediya, with whom no other Muhammadan would associate, and who are forbidden to enter the mosque or to use the public burial ground.”⁹

In the nineteenth century and in the early part of the twentieth century, the Sharif class Muslims in Bengal tried their utmost to maintain their caste-pride by practising a sort of endogamy among themselves and by abstaining from interdining or mixing on equal terms with the lower classes. But the levelling influence of the British rule proved to be more powerful than their caste pride. The British introduced modern education and modern state administrative machinery and for that machinery personnel was recruited from all sections of the society. The British rule therefore became the leveller of social stratification in Bengal. The so-called “Sharif” classes as a rule belonged to the feudal nobility or were in some way connected with it. With the disappearance of the Muslim rule, the feudal nobility began also to lose its economic power together with its political power. Because of such an impact of the British rule, a new type of social stratification began to evolve in the Bengali Muslim society. The only way left for the so-called “Sharif” classes of the Muslims in Bengal to maintain their social position was by having marital relationships with the rising Muslim middle classes, which were being recruited from all sections of Muslim society, especially from the “non-Sharif” classes. At the beginning, social conservatism stood in the way of such marital relationships, but the demands of the time gradually overcame the social conservatism. Maulvi Abdul Wali, who has shed many tears at the pitiful economic conditions of the so-called “Sharif” classes, describes such a transition in the following words, in an article entitled “Ethnographical Notes on Muhammadan Castes of

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

Bengal": "In some parts of Nadia, Jessore, Bakerganj, Dacca and Faridpur (these are all Districts in East Pakistan), lower classes sometimes would marry to better class families on account of the prosperity of one and the poverty of the other. When these unequal or *ghair kufv* marriages take place, lower classes would assume such titles as Munshi, Mulla, Biswas, Jawardar and are sometimes called *Atraf Bhalamanus* or 'an *Atraf* made a gentleman'."¹⁰

Besides the two classes just discussed, Levy has pointed out that a third class is generally added, i.e. *Arzal*, "lowest of all". Such a three-fold classification is also correct; because the *Ashraf* are those who claim to be the purest of the aristocrats, *Atraf* are those who cannot levy such a claim. The members of the *Arzal* class, again, cannot even associate with the *Atraf* class, they have the most hated occupations, such as, sweepers, *kalals* (manufacturers of alcoholic liquors), butchers, *Halalkhors* (latrine cleaners), *Bediyas* (gypsies), etc. Therefore, we have the following broad classification of the Bengali Muslim society, before it was substantially affected by the growth of a significant and politically powerful Muslim middle class from the beginning of the twentieth century:

- (1) *Ashraf*—Noblest of all, who despise all kinds of manual work and claim real or fictitious foreign ancestry (and such a claim to foreign ancestry is generally and vaguely recognized by the neighbourhood community), or claim long-standing marital relationships with such families, as have distinct claims to foreign ancestry. This class also claims some sort of past or present association with feudal status and land control.

¹⁰ Maulvi Abdul Wali "Ethnographical Notes on the Muhammedan Castes of Bengal" *Journal of Anthropological Society of Bombay*, Vol. VII, p. 108.

- (2) Atraf Bhalamanus (or "Atraf made a gentleman") or Rising Muslim Middle Class—who because of their prosperity and education have been able to contract marriage relationships with the Ashraf class.
- (3) Atraf—In the eyes of the Ashraf class, all except the members of their own class are Atraf. The members of the Atraf class cannot claim any foreign ancestry worth mentioning and are not maritally interconnected with the Ashraf class. There are various gradations among the members of this class, which we will presently discuss.
- (4) Arzal—The Indian Census Report, 1901, Part-II, p. 544, states, "In some places, a third class called Arzal or 'lowest of all' is added. It consists of very lowest castes, such as Halalkhor, Lalbegi, Abdal and Bediya, with whom no other Muhammadan would associate, and who are forbidden to enter the mosque or to use the public burial ground."

It should be remembered that such a classification of the Bengali Muslim society of the nineteenth century is only for the convenience of study. Some group of people may claim themselves to be Ashrafs, but may not be recognized as such by the *Real* Ashraf class. Again, in the Ashraf class, there will be various gradations according to the degree of the purity of the foreign ancestry, together with such criteria as wealth, prosperity, education and attainments of individual families. In the Atraf classes there will be further subdivisions according to the type of occupations which a particular social group might be following. In 1894 J. Wise made a study of the caste tendencies among the Muslims in Bengal. The following account by him would give a rough idea of the relative positions of some occupations generally pursued by the Bengali Muslims:

"The most respectable occupations are those of the Darzi, Jildar, Jutiwalah, Nanbai, Naich-band, Patwa, Rangrez, Rafugar; the most dishonouring, those of Banjunia, Beldar, Chamra-farosh, Dhobi, Dhuniya, Julaha, Kalwar, Kolu, Kuti, Mahi-farosh, and Nilgar.

"The learned professions such as Hakim, Hafiz, Khwandkar, Macawwir, Mullah, and Munshi are respected by all classes..... The chief reason why one trade is accounted less reputable than another is, that the most honoured were originally Muham-madan, the despised ones Hindu. The eight trades mentioned as honourable provide for wants which were secondary in the eyes of the Hindus. The trades of the tailor, book-binder, shoe-maker, baker, and darner, unknown in Bengal, when Muham-madans first settled there, were necessarily followed by their own countrymen from Upper India, and therefore did not entail any disgrace or degradation."¹¹

Thus from the above quotation we find that honourable professions and noble birth both have something to do with their foreign origin and foreign background. It should, however, be mentioned here that the classes who follow the above professions are generally regarded by Ashraf class as inferior, with the exception of religious professions such as Hakim, Hafiz, Khwandkar, Macawwir, Mullah or Munshi, etc. A person belonging to the Ashraf class may have such professions, or "family names", indicating past or present occupations followed by him. But the point here is to be noted that although with the economic decline, the members of the Ashraf class might have taken up such occupations and professions, or even lower occupations, their pride is not based upon such occupations and professions, but upon their past or present associations with feudal status and land control.

¹¹ J. Wise, "The Muhammadans of Eastern Bengal" *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. LXIII, No. 1, 1894, p. 60.

To test our above theoretical and historical position with regard to Muslim social classes, we shall take up the study of social classes with reference to some specific areas. These specific areas will be the districts of Noakhali and Barisal in East Pakistan. I have observed that there is a greater degree of accuracy and consciousness about the minute details of social stratification within the village. But if the unit which we are studying is bigger, say, a district or as a matter of fact the whole Muslim community of Bengal (particularly the pre-partition Bengal), the accuracy and consciousness about the minute details of social stratification will not be so great. Generally well-to-do families would have marital relationships in such areas and such consciousness about social classes would primarily concern them.

SECTION II

Muslim Social Groups in the District of Noakhali

Our discussion of the Muslim social classes in the District of Noakhali, East Pakistan, will be based on the account left by J. E. Webster in *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteer—Noakhali*, 1911. J. E. Webster was the District Officer, Noakhali, at the time of writing the account. Webster gives the following social composition of the Muslim population from the Census of 1901 :

Shekhs	...	...	860,290
Pathans	...	...	1,000
Saiyads	...	...	1,300
Nikari (fisherman)	...	...	1,000
Nigarchi	...	...	900
Dai (families whose female members specialize in midwifery)	...	...	1,300

Webster says about the census figures: "Among the Saiyads and Pathans may be seen aquiline features and sinewy frames that proclaim unmistakably their foreign extraction, but it may safely be said that vast majority of the Shekhs and lower sections of the community are descended from the aboriginal races of the district, some from Kaistha converts. Pir Ambar Shah (Amrabad) Pir Ahmed Khondkar (Babupur) made most of the converts. Mohammedans with the surname of Chand, Pal, Dutt are to be found in the district to this day."

Note :—Chand, Pal, Dutt are surnames of Hindus in Bengal. Muslims generally have Arabic names. But sometimes Hindu converts to Islam used to retain their Hindu surnames. Under the influence of reforming priests, Muslims of the district have practically given up their Hindu surnames. Webster was writing in 1911, when the Hindu surnames could still be found. Nowadays they have become very rare.

The above account of the social classes of the district of Noakhali clearly reflects our previous observations. We here find no mention of the Mughals. This is because the Mughals as such constitute numerically very small number. (*vide* Census figures as quoted in p. 122) We have earlier observed that in the Indian environment the claim to foreign ancestry began to be reckoned as "noble" and this is exactly the case with the Syeds and Pathans of the district. But mere claim to foreign extraction did not make a person necessarily a *sharif*—he must also be associated with land control and feudalism. All Syeds and Pathans do not necessarily belong to the *sharif* class. Claim to foreign ancestry, together with land control and feudal status, made a person a *sharif*. This land control and feudal status, might be substantial or nominal; nevertheless it was necessary to make a person belong to the *sharif* class.

Note— We have here purposely chosen the district of Noakhali for the study of the position of the Muslim social groups at the beginning of the twentieth century, when a modern Muslim middle class had not yet been formed. Noakhali is known throughout East Pakistan for the pervading influence of the priestly class called the Mullahs and “pure” Islam. Webster says, “Formerly, it is said Mohammedans kept too many of their Hindu customs, but about the middle of the last century they came under the influence of a reforming priest, Moulvi Imamuddin, and are now almost to a man Farazis. They abhor all innovations (*bida’at*) and the worship of saints (*shark*) (sic).” It is therefore interesting to see how social classes retained their separateness in spite of the contrary efforts of the reforming priests.

SECTION III

Muslim Feudal Sharif Families in the District of Barisal

The census figures quoted in the case of Noakhali (see p. 131) only make a very broad classification. But in each district of East Pakistan, there are a few recognized sharif families, who undisputably lay claim to “noble birth”. Besides them there are others who also lay claim to such *sharafati* or *khandani* (both mean nobleness of birth), but their *sharafati* or *khandani* is derivative, that is, their *sharafati* or *khandani* is due to their marital relationships with such recognized *sharif* or *khandan* families.

I have got report from Barisal that generally six Muslim families are regarded as the most sharif or khandan families in the district of Barisal. Of these six Muslim feudal sharif families of Barisal, two families lay distinct claim to foreign ancestry and people also regard them as such. It is claimed that the ancestors of one of these two families came to Barisal from somewhere outside Bengal (in Bengal if somebody comes from outside Bengal, i.e., from northern India, that is thought to be a sufficient claim to foreign ancestry; and if it is from Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan or Central Asia, it is all the better). It is claimed that the ancestor of the other family came from Medina, Arabia. Because of such a distinct claim to foreign ancestry of the above two feudal families, they are regarded as the most sharif in comparison to the rest.¹²

SECTION VI

Muslim Social Classes Under the Muslim Rule

It will be instructive here for us to analyse the nature of social stratification introduced by the Muslim rule among the Muslims. Speaking about the social classes and social stratification of this period, K.M. Ashraf says, "The composition of various social classes was more or less simple."¹³ This is correct, because we have already found that it is only with the development of capitalism that the determination of social classes becomes difficult. During the pre-capitalist period, the

¹² The report is from Mr. A.F.M. Nurul Alam, formerly a student of the Department of Political Science, University of Dacca. I think this is the correct place to thank Mr. Alam for his keen interest in empirical investigations about Muslim social classes of East Pakistan.

¹³ K.M. Ashraf, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

society was more status-based and therefore the determination of social classes was more or less easier. K.M. Ashraf enumerates the following Muslim social classes during the Muslim rule :

Muslim society could be roughly divided into three broad divisions : (1) The Upper Classes, (2) The Domestics and the slaves, and (3) The Masses.

The Upper Classes

The upper classes could be subdivided into the following :

(i) **Ahl-i-daulat**, or the ruling class proper, composed of the royal family, the nobility and the army chiefs;

(ii) **Ahl-i-sa'adat**, or the intelligentsia, which comprised the theologians, the judicial functionaries, the Syeds, the leaders of religious thought and men of reputed piety and religious devotion and the men of learning, especially poets and writers;

(iii) **Ahl-i-murad**, or the class catering to the pleasures, which was composed of musicians and minstrels, beautiful girls and others, who contributed to the success of pleasure parties.

The Domestics and Slaves

K.M. Ashraf points out that the domestics and slaves under the Muslim rule constituted a distinct class, separate from the Muslim masses. The preponderance of the domestic servants still is very special to India and Pakistan. European travellers in the past were struck by the phenomenon of large number of domestic servants possessed by the Indian noblemen. The slave system in India did not develop along western lines, that is, slaves in India were not used for productive purposes. The slaves were mainly employed for personal services (together with other domestic servants recruited from the free men). One curious point to

be noted here is that the condition of the domestics and the slaves was much better than that of the masses. There is no doubt that the slaves were at times brutally tortured, but according to the account of the European travellers, the Indian Muslims generally humanely treated the slaves.¹⁴ The country had to face terrible famines at times, when the masses had the freedom to starve, whereas the slaves on the whole enjoyed a comfortable livelihood under the patronage of their masters. Even during normal times their condition was much better than that of the masses.

The Muslim Masses

It is very doubtful whether the Muslim masses ever got any preferential treatment in the hands of the Muslim rulers. It is true that the Muslim merchants got preferential treatment from the hands of the Muslim rulers in the shape of lower taxes, lower duties on merchandise, etc., but such preferential treatment of the Muslims was primarily confined to the upper classes. The masses did not get any benefit out of that. During the Muslim rule in the course of time a large number of converts were added to Islam and therefore it was factually impossible for any administration to show such preferential treatment toward the Muslims, even if it so wished. On this point, W.C. Smith says, "It has been frequently observed that the Muslims were the ruling class before the British came. It is equally true

¹⁴ "In his *Oriental Memoirs* (Vol. II, p. 225), Forbes remarked that Muslims in general treated their slaves with humanity and rendered their servitude easy and comfortable, while those purchased by the English had not much reason to complain of their lot. All were household servants and often confidential domestic friends, and they were never employed in agriculture or other laborious work. 'With the Dutch in India their condition is not so pleasant, but the most unfortunate of all are those who fall into the hands of the Portuguese generally a worthless race treating their helpless captives with excessive cruelty'."—L.S.S. O'Malley, "The Impact of European Civilization", article in *Modern India and the West*, edited by O'Malley (London : Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 73.

and much more important, that the Muslims were the lowest class. As we have said, Islam made most of its converts, millions upon millions of them, from among the oppressed and the poor. It raised their ideological level, but not their economic. Consequently, the great bulk of Muslims to-day are peasants and proletariat; while some of their landlords, and all their mill-owners, are Hindus.”¹⁵

No doubt the egalitarian tenets of Islam, as preached by the Muslim missionaries, appealed to lower sections of Hindu society and to save themselves from the oppressions of the caste-ridden Hindu society, they turned to Islam. But in so doing, they could not rise much above their environment. “With his conversion to Islam the average Muslim did not change his old environment which was deeply influenced by caste distinctions and a general social exclusiveness. As a result, Indian Islam slowly began to assimilate the broad features of Hinduism. The various classes of which Muslim community was composed began to live aloof from one another even in separate parts of the same city. On the other hand the honour and respect paid to the foreign ruling and privileged classes gave to the foreign and non-Indian extraction of a Muslim the highest claims to social distinction. People began to discover for themselves as far as possible a foreign ancestry.”¹⁶

In our study we have found that although Islam was imported into India from outside and although Islam differed in some important respects from the Hindu assumptions, the Indian Mus-

¹⁵ W.C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India* (London : Victor Gollancz, 1946), pp. 164-165.

¹⁶ K.M. Ashraf, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-192. For the section on “Muslim Social Classes Under the Muslim Rule” we have depended almost entirely upon K.M. Ashraf’s article, “Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan”. In his analysis, K.M. Ashraf has depended primarily on the descriptions left by Muslim historians. K.M. Ashraf’s analysis of Muslim social classes during the Muslim rule is by far the best.

lim community during the Muslim rule largely reflected the traditional Hindu social stratification. This was but natural in an agricultural economy. But Islam because of its very nature effected some changes in the class structure—Islam introduced some amount of dynamism, but Islam did not bring about fundamental changes. Because of this we find that the *Ulema*, or the Muslim religious classes, began to be venerated just like the Brahmins in Hindu society; in the same way, the Muslim ruling classes occupied the position almost similar to that of the Khshatriyas. On the other hand, the Muslim masses divided themselves into various classes and began to live aloof from one another, even in separate quarters of the same city or village. Thus, Muslims in India forgot the egalitarian teachings of original Islam, and became ardent believers in class distinctions.

SECTION V

Rise of the Bengali Muslim Middle Class

We have found that during the Muslim rule, the Muslims made up not only the ruling class, but also the lowest class. Because of this, in the Muslim community we do not find any significant nucleus of a Muslim middle class, from which the new middle class created by the British rule could have been drawn. All competent observers of the Indian phenomenon are of the opinion that during the Muslim rule the Muslims did not take much to trade, commerce or subsidiary occupations associated with them. Thus, writing in 1872, W.W. Hunter says, "As haughty and careless conquerors of India, they (Muslims) managed the subordinate administration by Hindus, but they kept all the higher appointments in their own hands. For example, even after the enlightened reforms of Akbar (sixteenth century), the distri-

bution of great offices of the State stood thus :—Among the twelve highest appointments, with title of Commander of more than Five Thousand Horse, not one was a Hindu. In the succeeding grades, with title of Commander of from Five Thousand Horse, out of 252 officers, only 31 were Hindus under Akbar. In the next reign, out of 609 Commanders of these grades, only 110 were Hindus; and even among the lowest grades of the higher appointments, out of 169 Commanders of from Five Hundred to Two Hundred Horse, only 26 were Hindus.”¹⁷

Observing the conditions of Muslims during his visit to India between 1883-1884, W.S. Blunt in his book, *India Under Ripon*, says, “The pride of conquest is the bane of all Mohammedan societies sprung from Northern Asia, and the Mohammedans of India form no exception. The Moguls never condescended to trade, but either settled on the land or took service, civil or military under government; and their descendents are still swayed by the same proud instincts.”¹⁸

W.C. Smith says, “...throughout the country the foreign invaders who were Muslims were and remained overwhelmingly feudal, landed. To the very end of the Mughal period they did not oust the already established, Hindu classes engaged in trade and in the non-military professions, the minor clerks, etc. Nor did they win converts to Islam from among these classes; it was the destitute and the outcast who flocked to the new religion. Yet it was to a large extent from these mercantile and professional classes that the new bourgeoisie was later drawn.”¹⁹

Our concern here is with the Bengali Muslim community. In Bengal particularly the Muslim missionaries were in a position

¹⁷ W.W. Hunter, *Our Indian Mussalmans* (London : Trubner Company, 1872), pp. 152-153.

¹⁸ Wilfred Scawen Blunt, *India Under Ripon, A Private Diary* (London : Adelphia Terrace, T. Fisher Unwin, 1909), p. 290.

¹⁹ W.C. Smith, *Loc. cit.*

to effect mass conversions from the lower sections of the Bengali community. (Conversions were often from those who were non-Hindus and Buddhists. Hinduism could never really make Bengal the place of orthodox Hinduism. We have discussed this point in the first part of our book.) Therefore, during the Muslim rule in the Bengali Muslim community we could probably find two distinct classes, the Muslim Upper Classes, depending upon the favours of the Muslim political supremacy and the poverty-stricken Muslim masses. With the introduction of British rule these favours began to be rapidly withdrawn. As a result, the so-called Muslim sharif classes, surviving on the patronage and favours of the State, began to dwindle gradually. The British not only withdrew all favours, but began following a policy of hostility against the Muslim upper classes. "The communal differences, particularly the differences between the Hindus and Moslems, could be exploited with advantage was realized quite early in the nineteenth century. In 1821 a writer in the *Asiatic Journal* said : '*Divide et impera* should be the motto of our Indian administration,' and the view was supported by an army officer who likewise pronounced that 'our endeavour should be to uphold in full force the (for us, fortunate) separation which exists between the different religions and races; not to endeavour to amalgamate them!' The policy was officially endorsed in 1858 by Lord Elphinstone, the Governor General.

"Till the end of the century, it was the Moslems who were singled out for official disfavour."²⁰

W.C. Smith says, "All competent observers agree that the Government of India singled out the Muslim community for deliberate repression for the first decade or so after the Mutiny. What they mean is that the government repressed the Muslim upper classes, and the sections from which the middle classes

²⁰ K.S. Shelvankar, *Problem of India* (London : Penguin Books Ltd., 1940), p. 21.

would have been drawn. (The peasants were and always have been repressed; no new policy was devised for them, and their treatment was quite indistinguishable from that meted out to any other peasants, Hindu or whatever.)”²¹

The British rule transferred the political power from the hands of the Muslim rulers to the British merchant capitalists and with such a transference of power, degeneration set in among the Muslim feudal nobles. The decline of the Muslim nobility in Bengal has been described by W.W. Hunter in his book *Our Indian Mussalmans* : “A hundred and seventy years ago it was almost impossible for a well-born Mussalman in Bengal to become poor; at present it is almost impossible for him to continue rich.”²²

The British rule persisted for the longest period of time in Bengal and consequently effected a greater amount of social change in Bengal than in any other part of India. Because of this, the social power, prestige and position of the upper classes of the Muslims, accruing to them from their relationship with the land, was destroyed by the British rule quite thoroughly. A landlord class among the Muslims does not exist in East Pakistan today, as it exists in West Pakistan or Upper India.

The British capitalist enterprise failed to expand; but the Hindu middle class created by the British rule expanded more than the demand. As a result, bitter criticism of the British rule began in the Hindu middle class circles, and soon took the form of militant Indian nationalism symbolized by the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885. At this time the British government realized that they should abandon their policy of hostility towards the Muslim community (i.e., the Muslim upper classes and the potential sections of the Muslim population from which the Muslim middle class could

²¹ W.C. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

²² W.W. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

be formed). Sir Syed Ahmad came forward to conciliate with the British in the northern India. In Bengal, persons like Syed Ameer Ali, Nawab Abdul Latif, Nawab Nawab Ali Choudhury, Nawab Abdul Ghani and Nawab Salimullah of Dacca came forward to conciliate with the British and to take full advantage of the fruits of British administration, that is, to take advantage of the jobs and posts which the British administration had created for its own purposes. Thus Muslims (meaning the Muslim rising middle class) began to be given more and more privileges (relatively more than its Hindu counterpart), in jobs and in education. The educated Muslim middle class was rapidly formed, and such an educated class is recruited from all sections of the society; but this middle class desired to be maritally connected with the "Sharif" class, because this would give them social status. We have seen that although there were caste tendencies among the Bengali Muslims, those could never become rigid castes on the Hindu model, because of the greater fluidity of the Islamic system. Because of this elasticity of the Islamic system and because of the impact of British rule, the social stratification and social classes show democratic tendencies among the Muslims of present-day East Pakistan.

Today, even a very poor Muslim (except probably the lowest classes, doing despised jobs, such as sweepers, Kalals, Halalkhors, etc.) can in this way or that way, show his marital connections with some members of the so-called "sharif" classes (and he generally quotes such relationships). In the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century, it was of great social value for the members of the middle class in Bengal to be maritally connected with the sharif *zats* (in Bengali language "zat" means Caste, and this term is used to denote the caste categories of the Sharif class. Opposite of Sharif *zat*, would be *Chhota zat* or *Atraf zat*). But today the members of the middle class are much greater in number. They exercise profound influence in

the political and other aspects of life in East Bengal. Thus the middle class itself has been developing its own class pride and therefore, it is today of little significance whether or not the members of this newly educated middle class in East Bengal are maritally connected with the so-called "sharif zats."

SECTION VI

Some Recent Trends

The Second World War and the Second Partition of Bengal (1947) are today giving a new orientation to the nature of social stratification among the Muslims in East Pakistan. We are not yet in a position to comprehend the full implications of the effects of the Second World War and the inflation which was associated with it. East Bengal came directly within the war zone and of all regions in India had to experience the greatest amount of inflationary effects during the war. Because of this, we can assert that in the near future East Pakistan would have to face a great social change. That such a social change is taking place, is visible in all aspects of social life. If anybody analysed the position of social classes in any village of East Pakistan, he would find that former social ties, based on traditional family ties, or ties arising out of "communal production", or such other form of ties, are today gradually breaking down. The Second Partition of Bengal has given further impetus to such a process of the breakdown of the old order. The new classes of merchants and moneylenders and middle class professionals of various types, hitherto unknown in the Muslim society are being rapidly formed to fill up the gap created by the departure of such Hindu classes from East Pakistan, with the Second Partition of Bengal. Any analysis would show that there has been a sudden

increase of the Muslim urban population after the partition in 1947. The social consequences of such a rapid change in the social population is still to be studied; but it is clear that such studies would invariably show that a great change is taking place.

We have pointed out earlier that due to the patronage of the British government, from the beginning of the twentieth century (roughly the date would be 1906, when the First Partition of Bengal was effected to give some special privileges to East Bengali Muslims in jobs, etc.) an educated Muslim middle class was being formed, which was taking the leadership in the cultural and political life of the country. Socially speaking, the newly-educated middle class created by the British became a very powerful class in the political life of the country—in some sense more powerful than the Muslim upper class in East Bengal. (This remark is applicable with regard to the conditions in East Bengal during the British rule. This is, however, not applicable to the Muslim middle classes in Upper India or West Pakistan. In those areas, the upper classes continued to dominate the political life in spite of the growth of a significant middle class under the British rule.) But this educated Muslim middle class of East Bengal has been hard hit by the Second World War and inflation. The new merchant class which is rapidly coming into prominence in East Pakistan today, is also destined to play a great role in the country's economy. This new merchant class has money and is trying to buy its social position by having marital ties with the educated middle class. What will be the future outcome of this "marriage" between the new merchant class and the educated middle class we cannot say at this stage.

PART III

CHANGING RURAL SOCIETY

CHAPTER VII

RURAL EAST PAKISTAN TODAY

We shall now take up a comparative study of the village constitution with reference to some contemporary accounts of villages of the Indian subcontinent. I shall discuss in particular the social organization of a typical village of East Pakistan and then compare and contrast some of its features with other contemporary accounts of villages, such as, Senapur in U.P., India (description given by Morris Opler and Rudra Dutt Singh); Alankar in the District of Sylhet, East Pakistan (description given by Marion Smith); and Six Villages of Bogra District, East Pakistan (description given by Ramkrishna Mukherjee).

SECTION I

A Typical Village of East Pakistan

In an earlier chapter we have already described the nature of the social organization of a sixteenth-century village as left by the Bengali poet Mukundaram. It will be worthwhile to contrast that description with the present conditions of a typical village in East Pakistan. We shall call the village by the fictitious name "Nayanpur". The village is located somewhere in the eastern part of East Pakistan.

We call the village under review a typical village of East Pakistan, because here in this village we find the mixture of the old and new. Although it has been less affected by urban life, there has been considerable impact of western

culture. In East Pakistan good communications are rare and therefore, the advancement of areas sometimes largely depends on the availability of good means of communication. In the case of the village under review, although a famous road passes through it, the nearest railway station is 10 miles away and the more important stations are all over 16 miles away. The village therefore has retained some of its former features, which again are fast disappearing in recent years.

The Village Area : The area occupied by the village is about 1 sq. mile. The population according to the census of 1951 is 2210. With the population increase, the village in the course of time has developed other autonomous areas within it. Therefore, at present the village is divided up into six subunits. Although all these six are nowadays shown in the government official records as subunits of Nayanpur, they are for all practical purposes independent units and may be treated as separate villages. In spite of this there also exists an overall unity among them.

The Village Organization : From what I could gather from the villagers, it seems to me that even a century ago, the village organization was a powerful body. The cohesion of the village organization has broken up particularly as a result of the two successive World Wars. A good number of the young men of the village went out to various places of the world and on their return, they developed a spirit of defiance to the village elders. Inflation also undermined the relative positions of the different social classes within the village. Soon the village elders found themselves powerless to enforce their decisions. Moreover, the new education and new state administrative machinery introduced by British rule undermined the foundations of the time-honoured rural institutions. The families which traditionally produced village leaders greatly declined in economic position,

while those families which did not produce leaders were in a position to enter into petty government or factory jobs and were able to receive a smattering of "modern" education. Such factors combined with the neglect by the government of the role of the village institutions, led to a great decline of the village constitution.

It seems that the communal ownership of land in the village never existed, at least since the founding of the village. Individual plots of land have always been clearly demarcated. They are divided up among the inheritors of property according to the Islamic law of inheritance. (The small Hindu population in the village follow the Hindu law of inheritance.) Although the ownership and inheritance of property have always been individualistic, the village organization was nevertheless powerful in many matters. The village organization played its role in various ways. In the first place, it played a role in the economic life. The village community set up regulations that individual cultivators were to help each other by rendering physical labour, whenever necessary, without payment. Whenever required, they were to use each other's cattle and other implements for cultivation. Although cultivation was on a purely individualistic basis, the necessity required at times that the cultivators help each other. Again if epidemic, famine, fire, pestilence, death, disease brought misfortune to someone, the other members of the village were required by the village community to share that misfortune. The manner in which assistance was to be rendered to the afflicted, was determined by the village community.

In recent years, the control over economic life by the village community has greatly declined. The village community controls the social aspect of life more than the economic aspect. It, for example, determines what amount an individual is to spend in a social ceremony, for example, a marriage. It determines how many guests a person is to invite, for example, if he proposes

to kill a goat. Again, in case a villager wishes to kill a cow, he must invite villagers of a larger area, and so on. These functions of the village organization are not trifling matters, because such feasts even in recent years were frequent.

The village organization in spite of its decline still performs all necessary social control functions. Disputes must be settled within the village, before one goes to the court. These disputes may relate to land boundaries, marital adjustment, assault, and what not. But those who have much money may go to the court. Moreover, the settlements arrived at the village council may not be carried out by one of the parties in the dispute and the village council has no power of enforcing its decisions. Sometimes the village elders may give their judgement in a biased way and sometimes they are bribed, and the aggrieved party may therefore wish to test his case in a court of law. In the case of petty disputes tribunals are set up by the village community for adjudication, while in the case of bigger disputes the whole village council decides the case. In the case of petty disputes, both the parties may agree to appoint one or a group of arbitrators themselves, without referring the matter to the village council.

The religious life of the villagers is controlled by the village organization with the help of the Mullah. Here discretion plays a secondary part and the written law (of the Quran or the Hadith) plays the greater part.

The above functions of the village organization constitute a formidable list and I have found that the village elders remain so much immersed in discharging the above functions that they hardly have any time for their personal household duties.

How is the power of the village organized today?

We have already noted that the village has been split up into six autonomous units and today these autonomous units are

independent of each other. It seems in the past all of them were under one village organization and they were oligarchically dominated by the Choudhuries (about whom we shall very shortly discuss). But with the economic decline of the Choudhuries, the other areas of the village separated themselves and set up their own organizations. The Choudhuries now control southern part of the village or a portion of it. They are associated with a village organization in that part, but they do not allow outsiders to question the discipline of their own family members. According to them the ordinary folk have no right to sit in judgement of the members of the Choudhury family. Although the village constitution is on the whole democratic, here an oligarchic element survives, and all the villagers accept such a claim of the Choudhuries without question. The Choudhuries are nowadays satisfied to have control of the *Ghulams* (formerly slaves) and wood-cutters and such other people of the lower class who live in their neighbourhood.

The social control function of the village to some extent centres around the mosque and the *Iddgah* (open space for the two annual *Idd* prayers). The Muslim mosque is not like the Hindu temple. Every Friday, all adult male Muslims are expected to assemble in some mosque of the village for the *jumma* (weekly congregational) prayer. Negligence of such attendance is questioned by the Mullah and the village elders. If some person has committed a "crime" in contravention of the religious or social codes, that matter may be brought up in the mosque. Other types of social welfare questions may also be raised at such convenient gatherings. Each of the subunits of the village Nayanpur, that we have earlier noted, has a mosque of its own. If a section is dissatisfied with a particular group, it might plan to set up a separate mosque for its Friday prayers. On several occasions this has been the case. Similar is the position of the *Iddgah*. But sometimes the *Iddgah* might unite people belonging

to more than one mosque. Although Islam enjoins much larger gatherings on such annual festivals like the *Idd*, the mutual jealousies of the villagers, as well as of the Mullahs, always stand in the way of larger gatherings. The authority of the Mullah centres around a mosque or an Iddgah. Areas are allotted to different Mullahs, and the villagers are expected to invite a certain Mullah from a particular locality in order to increase their crops or to cure a certain disease and also for various other mundane and spiritual purposes. (The belief is that a dinner given to the Mullah would cure the disease and increase the crop of the villagers who had given it.)

From the above description of the village constitution, it would appear that the village constitution is fully democratic. In some sense this is so. But, for an appreciation of the power structure of the village, it is required that we should examine the different classes and communities (by community I mean, for example, the Hindu community, or the ethnic group called the "Chittagonians") which inhabit the village—because the power structure is essentially based upon the social stratification of the village. I have found that the village elders constantly meet and decide on issues and there are, at times, differences of opinion among them. But at hardly any time do they make a decision by vote. The decisions which are made without voting have one good aspect—they are a compromise between two extreme views and therefore such decisions have a better chance of being accepted. At times decisions are also taken by a majority vote.

Social Stratification in the Village : Earlier we have already remarked that the villagers in Bengal would be found to be extremely conscious about the minute details of social stratification on a village level. Because of this, we would find that every occupation and status would be stratified by them. In the village under review, I have observed the following

hierarchically superimposed classes or groups which are clearly categorized and distinguished by the villagers :

I. Choudhuries—They claim to have once been the feudal chiefs of the village.

II. Khundakars—They claim to have once belonged to the priestly class.

III. Muhuris—They claim to have once belonged to the writer class (writer of deeds, etc.).

IV. Bhuyans—"Wealthy" peasant proprietors.

V. Agriculturists : Having their own cultivable lands.

VI. Landless agricultural labourers.

VII. Wage-earners of other sorts.

VIII. Wood-cutters in the neighbouring woods.

IX. "Slaves" or *Ghulams*—Once they were slaves. The law made them completely free by the Act V of 1843 and the Penal Code of 1860 completely prohibited the sale and purchase of slaves. But those who once were slaves still bear the social stigma and no member of the "free" classes would agree to be maritally connected with this "slave" class.

In this village about 5 p.c. of the population are Hindus, all of whom belong to the lowest castes of the Hindu social order. The hierarchical order among them is as follows :—

I. Potters.

II. Carpenters.

III. Weavers.

IV. Laundrymen (some of them have adopted barber's occupation).

Here we shall discuss only the Muslim social classes. It should be noted that besides the above social groups among the Muslims there is an ethnic group called the *Chittagonians*. They are all Muslims and have descended from the Hill tribes of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Among them still are to be found some of

their old Hill social customs, e.g., women have a greater voice in the management of the household, etc. Because of their separate ethnic origin, the other "general" Muslims of the village very rarely intermarry with the *Chittagonians*. They therefore do not come into our picture of social stratification of the village. Intermarriages are practised among "general" Muslims; but whenever a marriage takes place between a member of a lower social group with that of a higher social group, people think a "promotion" has taken place. I have marked that marriage relationships between group I and group II are frequent; but between group I and group III or group IV are rare and almost none between group I and V, VII, VIII, and impossible with group IX (that is, the group of "slaves").

Some wealthy members of the Choudhuries (i.e., group I) about a century ago contracted marriages with some recognized "sharif" families of the district in which the village is located. The present economic position of the Choudhuries is extremely precarious and their marriage connections during the last half a century have been gradually "deteriorating". But their one or two marriage connections with recognized "sharif" families are still quoted by them as well as by other villagers and they are therefore thought to be the most "noble" family in the village. Looking at their present cultural and economic status, probably we cannot term them to be "sharif" on a district scale, although the relatively well-to-do section among them is still recognized in the locality as "sharif". The democratic tendency of the village has been so strong that although there are some who belong to the "Atraf" classes, they are not generally called this, not even the "slave" class, which belong to the lowest stratum in the social ladder. Even a generation ago, none would have agreed to contract marriages with them, either in the village or outside the village. They must contract their marriages with similar families in other villages. In another village, with which

I am familiar, such a class of "slaves" exist and this class of "slaves" of Nayanpur contract their marriages with that class of "slaves" of the other village, which is twenty miles away from Nayanpur (even a generation ago 20 miles used to be thought too long a distance for marital relationships). In spite of their legal freedom, the "slaves" until recently used to maintain a strange allegiance to the members of group I. They often serve as menial servants in the houses of the Choudhuries and are required to do other kinds of work according to the dictation and "counsel" of the Choudhuries, although money payment for such services is becoming more and more a pronounced feature of such relationships.

The members of the first three social groups claim to have once belonged to the imposing professions which I have mentioned by name. But today most of them have either become agriculturists themselves or have joined the factories as wage-earners. A small number of Choudhuries and Khundakars (the first two groups) still lead the life of the middle class, as clerks in commercial firms, as petty government officers, lawyers, teachers, petty merchants and moneylenders, and other such petty occupations and professions. Wage-earner, petty clerks in business firms or factory, or petty jobholders of some kind under the government or municipal organizations—whatever might be the status of the villagers in the towns and in other places outside the village—such villagers on their return to their village would at once resume their status in the village and would begin to look down upon other folks in their village.

On a recent enquiry, I have found that the interrelations of social classes of the village Nayanpur are rapidly changing. It is true that the older folks in the village are still conscious about the minute details of class-status differences, but to the younger generation they are becoming more and more senseless. Intermarriages between different classes are becoming more

and more frequent. Even the social stigma that used to be attached to the "slave" class is no longer a very pronounced feature in ordinary social intercourse, except probably in cases of marriage. The reason seems to be general economic changes due to the two successive World Wars and also the spread of modern education and the development of political consciousness on the national level, which increasingly brought to the mind of the false pretenders of "nobility" that they themselves were no better than the labouring class on the national scale. Because of this, extreme consciousness about stratification, which prevailed a generation ago, is fast disappearing. Although the portrait of social classes of Nayanpur which I have drawn is no longer tenable so far as the younger generation is concerned, it still holds good for the present older generation of the village.

SECTION II

A Comparative Study of Nayanpur With Some Contemporary Accounts of other Villages

It will be interesting here for us to make a comparative study of Nayanpur with some contemporary accounts of other villages of the Indian subcontinent given by some recent writers. We shall not be in a position to discuss here the various aspects of the village constitution given by them. We shall here deal only with the social classes of those villages and compare them with those of Nayanpur.

We shall first take up the social classes of the village Alankar (Olonkari), about 7 miles south-west of the town of Sylhet, East Pakistan. Marion W. Smith in her article "Village Notes From Bengal" in the *American Anthropologist* gives the picture of the social classes of Alankar. She got the information from a former

inhabitant of the village (now a resident of New York City), by the name of Mr Abdul Rahman. Marion Smith says that there are seven villages around Alankar which form a unit.

"Eight groups exist among the Mohammedans of the seven villages: Soyod, Choudry, Sekh, Mogul, Majumdar, Fartan (sic), Gulam and Maimul. The first six of these groups consist of persons who are primarily landowners and who engage in trade. Members of these six may intermarry, the children belonging to the group of the father. The Soyod are the highest in status and are believed to be descendents of Mohammed. Yet, since a man of one of those six groups who has wealth and prestige may assume the name or title of Soyod, the descent is more honorary than real. Choudry also connotes high status and may be assumed. The informant is a Sekh. Although he insisted that all Mohammedans were alike and attended mosque without prejudice or distinction, the last two groups seem to be distinguished from the first six by occupation and by practical endogamy. ...Gulams who are wealthy and own much land still do not associate freely with other Mohammedans outside the mosque, and because they go barefoot except in the privacy of their own homes, they may be always recognized. Maimul are net workers and fishermen."¹

Note—In this description we have all the traditional classes of the Indian Muslim society, such as the Syed (misspelt, and probably mispronounced by the informant, as Soyod) Sheikh (similarly misspelt and mispronounced as Sekh), Mughal and Pathan. The informant of Marion Smith pronounces Pathan as *Fartan*. In East Bengal sometimes 'P' is pronounced as 'F' and 'r' is added.

From the description the reader will find that although there is intermarriage between different social classes in the above

¹ Marion Smith, "Village Notes From Bengal", *American Anthropologist*, Vol-48, No. 4, 1946, pp. 581-582.

village, predominantly inhabited by Muslims, we find a clear stratification. The picture fits quite well the composition of social classes of Nayanpur. It is evident from the description given by Marion Smith that the Muslim social classes do not correspond to the rigid caste system of the Hindus. In Nayanpur there is no existence of the major Muslim social classes, i.e., Syed, Sheikh, Mughal and Pathan. But in Marion Smith's description we find the existence of such major Muslim divisions together with other classes. Like Nayanpur, the different social classes do not have a pronounced tendency to marry within the same occupational groups: "Despite this emphasis upon social caste, the six groups of Mohammedan landowners mentioned seem neither to be very strict about refraining from other occupations nor about marrying within the occupation group. The informant's uncle was a carpenter and his sister married a shopkeeper in Biswanath. At the same time the informant insisted that no one of the six talukdar groups would marry a *Gulam* or *maimul*."²

Again, it might be interesting to compare the above description of social classes with the description given by Ramkrishna Mukherjee in his study of six villages of the District of Bogra, East Pakistan, under the title "Economic Structure of Rural Bengal". One point to be noted is that this writer mentions only two social groups "Muslim general" and "Muslim *Khulu*", the latter belonging to the lowest stratum of the Muslim social ladder in those six villages of Bogra. "Islam in principle does not tolerate any distinction among its followers, but the people belonging to the group of oil pressers (locally known as *Khulu*) are considered socially inferior to the general Muslims. Inter-marriages between these two groups is forbidden in these villages;

² Loc. cit.

hence, the group of 'Muslim Khulu' is regarded as behaving like a separate caste from the 'Muslim general'.³

Such a tendency in the marriage relations have also been marked by Morris Opler and Rudra Dutt Singh in their recent study of the village Senapur, U. P., India: "There are fifty Mohammedans in the village, representing four distinct groups (Dafalis, Bhats, Dhuniyas and Helas). Theoretically these groups remain outside the jati system (*referring to the caste system that is prevalent in the village of Senapur*). But Hindus believe that they are simply jatis of low status whose members have been converted to Islam at some time in the past, and they treat them as untouchables. Certainly these Muslim divisions exhibit most of the characteristic of jatis. They are hereditary occupational groups and are governed by regional assemblies which discipline and out-caste members. In spite of the equality that is supposed to pervade the Mohammedan life, members of the different functional groups do not intermarry and there are clearly discernible gradations of status among them.

"It is not surprising in view of the dominant Hindu pattern, that the most exalted position among the Muslims of Senapur is held by the priests or Dafalis.

"The Dafalis consider themselves superior in rank to other Muslims. Theoretically being followers of Islam, they may marry out of their group. Actually they do not do so. In fact, they do not even inter-dine with Helas, or sweepers, who are also Mohammedans."⁴

It would be evident that the above social classes of the village Senapur are nothing but in their turn the lowest stratum of the

³ Ramkrishna Mukherjee, "Economic Structure of Rural Bengal" *American Sociological Review*, 1948, p. 66, footnote.

⁴ Carleton S. Coon, *A Reader in Anthropology*, Morris Opler and Rudra Dutt Singh's article "The Division of Labour in an Indian Village" (New York : Henry Holt & Co., 1950), p. 491.

Muslim society, but even such classes maintain a social stratification peculiar to themselves. From the account of these various villages of the Indian sub-continent, one point is clear about the Muslim social classes, that they have a greater flexibility in their social system and their social classes are not rigid like the Hindu social castes. Another point is also clear—that in Muslim social classes there is always a lowest stratum (it might be *gulam* or *maimul* as in the case of the village in Sylhet, or *Ghulam* as in Nayanpur or *Khulu* as in the villages of Bogra or *Helas* as in the village of Senapur), with whom the general body of Muslims disdain to be related maritally. The interesting feature to be noted is that in Nayanpur, which is predominantly a Muslim village, all Hindu residents belong to the lowest Hindu castes, while in the predominantly Hindu village of Senapur all the Muslim residents belong to the lowest stratum of the Muslim society.

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A Bibliography of Bibliographies

In recent times attempts have been made to prepare exhaustive bibliographies in different fields of social sciences. Bibliographies published on general problems of the social sciences, such as, social stratification, political thought, etc., are too well known, for example, Harold W. Pfautz, "The Current Literature on Social Stratification : A Critic and Bibliography" *The American Journal of Sociology* Vol-LVIII, Number-4, January, 1953. I felt that I should mention here some important bibliographies on India and Pakistan. Consultation of such bibliographies might be of help to the student of Indian and Pakistani studies.

To begin with, for an introductory study of Indo-Pakistani problems, H. Mukherjee's bibliography under the heading "Suggested Reading" *India Struggles For Freedom* (Bombay: Kutub Publishers, 1948) pp. 235-237 is by far the best. The mimeographed stencil copy of David Mandelbaum's *Materials For A Bibliography of the Ethnology of India* (To be had of Prof. David G. Mandelbaum, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley, California, Stencil on July, 1949), is quite exhaustive. As the mimeographed stencil copy is already out of stock, the reader may consult David G. Mandelbaum's "A Guide to Books on India" *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. XLVI, No. 4, December, 1952.

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In a recent bibliography compiled by Mrs Indira Sarkar, *Social Thought in Bengal, 1775-1947*, we get practically all important books written in Bengali language in the field of social thought.

As we have not included books on the development of Islam, it will be fit that we should at least refer to important bibliographies in this field. For the economic and social aspects of the rise of Islam in Mecca, the bibliography at the end of Eric R. Wolf's "The Social Organization of Mecca and the Origins of Islam" *South-western Journal of Anthropology*, Vol-7, No. 4, Winter, 1951, would be quite good. For the historical aspect of the Muslim rule in India, the bibliography at the end of K.M. Ashraf's "Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal—Letters*, Vol-I, 1935. For a later period, Sha'afat Ahmad Khan, *Sources for the British India in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Milford, 1926). For the recent development of Islam in India, the bibliographies at the end of Murray T. Titus' book, *Indian Islam* (Calcutta: Milford, Oxford, 1930) and W.C. Smith's *Modern Islam in India* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946).

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